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APOSTOLIC TIMES



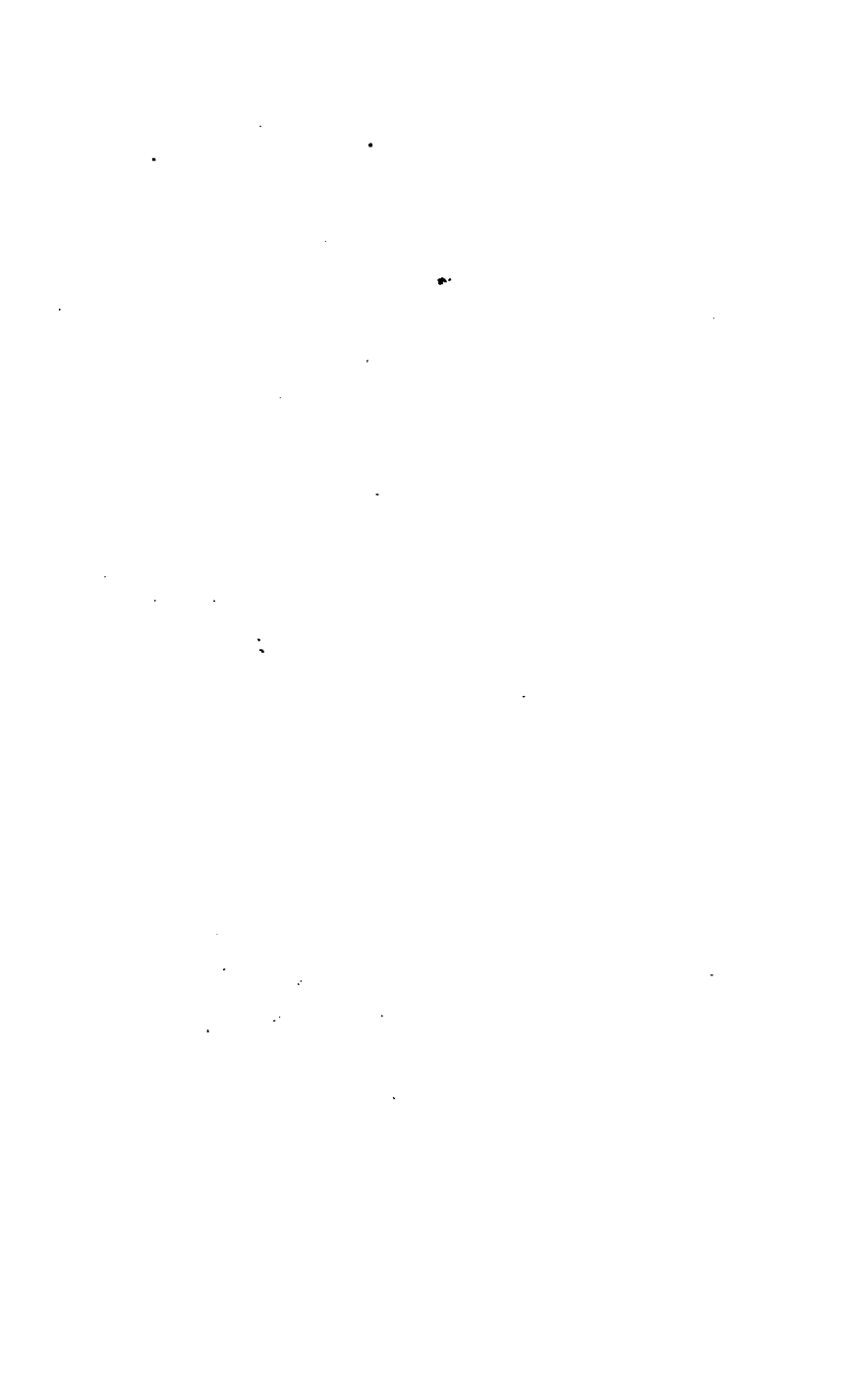




APOSTOLIC TIMES

AND

THEIR LESSONS.



APOSTOLIC TIMES

AND

THEIR LESSONS;

OR,

Plain, Practical Readings

FROM

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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APOSTOLIC TIMES

AND

THEIR LESSONS.

ACTS, xvi. 1-12.

1 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

IN the first of the verses which we have just read, we have the name mentioned of one who was very dear to the Apostle Paul, and to whom he wrote afterwards two of his Epistles. From different notices given us concerning Timothy this is what we learn concerning him: he had been piously trained in the knowledge of the Scriptures by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, both of whom had been brought to faith in Christ probably through the Apostle Paul's teaching; his father was a Greek, a Gentile,—his mother a Jewess, though a Christian;—he was St. Paul's 'own son in the faith,' brought to Christ through his ministry;—'prophecies going before on him' (1 Tim. i. 18), some special intimation of the will of the Spirit as it would seem,—had marked him out as likely to be useful in the work

of the ministry. History tells us that Timothy became bishop of the Church of Ephesus, and died at last a martyr's death.

Paul wishing to take his 'dearly beloved son,' as he calls Timothy, with him as his helper in missionary work, '*took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters.*' After what we have read in the fifteenth chapter as to circumcision not being enforced upon the Gentile Christians, this may seem at first to us rather strange. But it is quite plain that when Paul circumcised Timothy, he did so not from any idea of this being *necessary*, but solely out of *charity*, to disarm prejudice, and the better to gain for Timothy a favourable hearing from the Jews amongst whom he was going to preach the Gospel. Timothy, we must remember, had one Jewish parent, his mother. By one side he was of the natural Israel. And St. Paul never forbade a Jew to be circumcised. Though no longer *necessary*, circumstances might make it *expedient*. The case of Titus, as St. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Galatians, was different. He was a Greek,—wholly a Gentile,—and St. Paul would not allow him to be compelled to be circumcised. (Galatians, ii. 3.) In the case of Timothy then, the Apostle was only following his own rule of conduct: 'To the Jews became I as a Jew, . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.'

St. Paul then, accompanied by Timothy, and, as we gather from the tenth verse, by St. Luke, Silas, and others, set out for Phrygia and Galatia; making known wherever they went the decision to which the Council at Jerusalem had arrived, and so preaching the Gospel and imparting Christian instruction that '*the churches were established in the faith, and increased in number daily.*'

Then we have a most remarkable instance of the direct interference of God the Holy Ghost, in guiding the steps of those whom He employs as His messengers. When St. Paul and his company '*had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia.*' God's fit time had not yet come for this. Soon afterwards they *did* preach the word in Asia; and that too with such success, that 'all that were in Asia heard the word, both Jews and Greeks.' (Acts, xix. 16.) They came then to Mysia, and there laid their plans to go into Bithynia; but once again the Holy Spirit interfered and turned them aside from their intended course. They came down accordingly to Troas, -and there once more in a supernatural manner their steps were directed to new fields of labour awaiting them. '*A vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.*' From this vision St. Paul and his companions '*assuredly gathered*' that they were called by the

Lord to preach the Gospel in Macedonia. The result proved that they were perfectly right.

If we have not in these days voices and visions, testifying of the superintendence of the Holy Spirit in the affairs of His Church, and of His guidance of the steps of His messengers, let us not doubt that He exercises now as ever His power, secretly but effectually, in movements which go on around us. 'There are,' as St. Paul says, 'diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another, prophecy; . . . but all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will' (1 Cor. xii.) And He who gives a diversity of gifts and talents, moves hither and thither at His will His instruments. He takes away a candlestick from a people, amongst whom its light has long shone in vain; He places one where darkness has long reigned.

Nor do we need visions to convey to us calls for help from those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. It is impossible to take up a single report of missionary work in foreign parts without meeting with that which is to us a plain call, '*Come over and help us.*' The Gospel eagerly welcomed,—many converts made,—Bibles asked for and eagerly read,—missionaries heartily welcomed, loved, and listened to,—what are all these but plain and strong calls to

Calls for Help.

us to go and give spiritual help to those who need it? Of course we can, like the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, shut our ears, close our eyes, and harden our hearts; but the calls are as plain and loud as ever. St. Paul *might* have said of the vision which he saw, 'It is no doubt all fancy,—it means nothing,—it is no call to me.' He *would*, no doubt, have reasoned thus if he had been idle, cold-hearted, and selfish. But being full of love and zeal, he read the intimation given him of God's will very differently. And it will indeed be happy for us if, prizing the gospel for ourselves, knowing it as 'the power of God unto our own salvation,' we look out for the leadings of God's Providence, and listening watchfully to the calls for help which come to us from every quarter, go 'to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.'

ACTS, xvi. 13-15.

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

WE saw in the first part of this chapter three distinct interferences of the Holy Spirit, directing the steps of His messengers. They were turned aside from two parts where they thought themselves called to preach the Gospel; they were directed by a supernatural visitation to another. We very soon see the object of such interference, and the fruits of it. The cases of Lydia, the damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, the Philippian jailor, and those many others, for whose 'fellowship in the Gospel from the first' St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Philippians, written ten years after this, gives God

thanks,—shows us that God had ‘much people’ in Philippi, and that it was His will that His ministers should go and seek them out, and lead them to faith in Christ.

St. Paul and his company having reached Philippi, and remained there some days, quietly looking out for opportunities of usefulness, ‘*went on the Sabbath out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made;*’ to a spot, that is, where it was usual to hold on the Sabbath a meeting for worship. There they ‘*sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither.*’ Amongst these there was one, not a native of Philippi, but of Thyatira, and probably now at the former city for purposes of trade, Lydia by name, who heard Paul preach with deep interest and attention. There is every reason to think that Lydia was a person in easy circumstances. She was a ‘seller of purple,’ a dye for which Thyatira was greatly famed. Her trade was one which had to do particularly with the wants and luxuries of the rich and great. It is plain too, from the invitation which she gave to the Apostles after she had received the truth, that she had the means of showing generous Christian hospitality. It is said that she ‘*worshipped God.*’ She was, like Cornelius, a proselyte to the Jewish religion. She feared God, and up to the measure of her light and knowledge she sought and served Him. And her story, like that of the Roman centurion, is

instructive and encouraging to sincere but half-enlightened beginners in a Christian course, as showing us how God works often effectually on the heart, in a very gradual and almost imperceptible manner. There seems a comparatively long course of preparation in the soul; a drawing of the affections heavenwards; the twilight of early dawn going before the brightness of noonday.

It is said of Lydia that '*the Lord opened her heart to attend to the things spoken of Paul.*' If there was in Lydia a groping after light, there was still much darkness. If her heart was not quite closed against God, still it needed much more opening. And certainly we may say of the hearts of very many, that they are shut up against God and heavenly things. They are open enough to the world,—to its vanities, follies, and sins,—to its language of praise or blame; but locked and barred against '*the things of the Spirit.*' It is then of infinite importance that God should open our hearts as He opened the heart of Lydia. He alone can do it; and He is as willing as He is able. God has many keys;—the key of heaven to command rain to come down or to tarry; the keys of death and the unseen world to open or close for us, at His will, the grave; the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which He shutteth and no man openeth, and openeth and no man shutteth. And He too,—He alone,—has

the key of the human heart. Just as he who has made a very complicated lock can take it to pieces, and then put it, when cleaned and repaired, together again; so He who made the heart can read it, and renew it, and fit it for His service. *Ears* may be opened and *hearts* closed.

Often it seems as if God were knocking loudly at the door of the heart. By some startling providence, or some stirring appeal, He seems as if He would open it. But just then, many, instead of listening to God's voice and knock, and opening to Him, rush into vain amusements and worldly company; and so serious thoughts are banished, and wholesome fears are quieted, and the door of the heart is, as it were, slammed and closed in the very face of Him who seeks in infinite mercy to enter; and all settles down again into a deep but deadly calm. How ought we to pray when we hear God's word that our hearts may be opened to receive it! And how careful should we be not to close that which God is, by the working of His Spirit, seeking to open!

Lydia's heart was opened '*to attend to the things spoken of Paul.*' We might have expected that when God deals powerfully with a man's heart, He would at once, without the intervention of means, change and sanctify it. But it is not commonly so. God makes use of means. 'Faith cometh by hearing,

and hearing by the word of God.' 'By the foolishness of preaching' God saves 'them that believe.' So then Lydia's heart was drawn to give careful attention to the Gospel preached by Paul. The very foundation of faith is the Gospel. But it is not the simple hearing, but the careful attending to what is heard, that is the most important matter. What thousands of sermons have many of us heard without profit, because there was no 'attending' to them! 'Take heed,' said Christ, 'how ye hear.' Consider whose word it is that you hear; remember, too, each time you hear, that it may be the last time that the Spirit may through the word work upon your hearts.

We see the blessed fruits of careful attention to the word in Lydia's case. She received the word in meekness and faith, and being gathered spiritually into the fold and family of Christ, she received the outward seal of discipleship in baptism. Nor was she alone in her confession of faith; her household, whom she had already trained in the fear of God, being like her and with her instructed, were with her admitted into the Church of Christ. And faith wrought by love. Her heart was opened first, and then her house. She spoke humbly and modestly of herself, when asking Paul and his friends to come and be her guests. Her heart was warmed with love to Christ and His ambassadors. She would take no

denial, she 'constrained' the preachers of the Gospel to come under her roof. May God open our ears to hear the word, our hearts to receive it, and our hands to ministrations of love such as may prove our faith sincere.

ACTS, xvi. 16-18.

16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying :

17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

SHORTLY before our blessed Lord left the world, He gave this promise to His disciples, ' These signs shall follow them that believe : in my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents ; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands upon the sick, and they shall recover.' (Mark, xvi. 17, 18.) In the history of the Apostle Paul we see this promise remarkably fulfilled. From his own words we learn that he ' spake with tongues more than all ' of his brethren ; in the last chapter of the Acts we read of his taking up a viper in the island of Melita without harm ; in the

14 *The Spirit of Divination cast out.*

nineteenth chapter we read that 'God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul; so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs and aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.'

In the verses which we have just read from the sixteenth chapter, we have an instance of the power given to the apostle to cast out devils. The poor creature on whom this power was exercised at Philippi was a young woman possessed with a spirit of divination,—as we should call it, able to tell fortunes. Not, however, in the way which, in these days, it is done by impostors who go about deceiving people by lies, trusting for success in a fortunate guess now and then. The poor girl whom St. Paul pitied and relieved was possessed by an evil spirit, who had such power over her that the words which she spoke, though uttered by a human voice, were the words of a devil.

We should have thought that a poor creature thus tortured by the wicked one would have awakened nothing but pity in all who saw her. There were some, however, in Philippi, who looked at her in quite another way. They determined to make a gain out of her. It mattered nothing to them that she was a mere tool and mouthpiece of the devil. She served their purpose, and '*brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.*'

It is sad to read of gain made out of human misery

and sin, even amongst *heathens*. But what shall we say when we see and hear of like things in a professedly Christian country? Yet we know well that there are thousands who live by the sins of others, and thrive by their destruction. Some of these can only be hinted at; others prosper from keeping gin-palaces, where half-starved creatures are ruined body and soul; others for paltry gain promote drunkenness in a different way; others for gain rob themselves and their servants of God's day of rest; others encourage acts of fraud and dishonesty in trade, and teach those whom they employ to practise them to make their profits the greater. All such follow the example of those cruel and grasping men at Philippi, who used their poor slave as a means of making money, and were grieved and angry when the devil was cast out of her, and the hope of their gains was gone. Let us all be most careful that we never in any manner, direct or indirect, attempt to make a gain out of the sin of others; never help the devil in his cruel work; never rejoice in iniquity. Let no earthly gain, honour, or advantage, blind us to the fearful sin of helping to ruin a soul.

The poor damsel possessed with an unclean spirit followed St. Paul and his companions day by day, exclaiming, '*These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.*' We might rather have expected to hear such words from a holy angel than from an unclean devil. No angel

•

could have said anything more true. In like manner, when our Lord was upon earth, unclean spirits cried out, 'We know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.' 'What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most High God?' And not evil spirits only, but evil men too, have said things good and true. Balaam, wicked and covetous as he was, prophesied of Christ as the 'Star that should come out of Jacob, and the Sceptre that should rise out of Israel;' and prayed, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like His.' Caiaphas, even whilst plotting our Lord's death, spoke (under constraint) of His dying not for the Jewish nation only, but in order to gather together in one the people of God scattered abroad.

What shall we say of these things? Here is the devil speaking glorious truths; bad men turning preachers and prophets. All we can say is, they spake not of themselves, they obeyed a power which they could not resist; they uttered truths from which they themselves derived no benefit. St. James, when speaking of a worthless faith, says, 'Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble.' Much may be known, and much confessed, and all to no purpose. The true Christian believes, hopes, and loves; the devil believes, trembles, and hates. Peter says, when Jesus asks if he will forsake Him as others do, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast

the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.' The unclean spirit also owns Christ as 'the Son of the most High God;' but adds, 'What have I to do with thee? I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not.'

The devil turning preacher is an awful and pitiful sight. To tell of a salvation utterly out of his reach, and a Saviour who *is* and *can* be no Saviour for him, what can be conceived more sad and terrible? There is a lesson of solemn warning in all this for ministers. It is a wretched thing when a minister is like a sign-post which stands motionless at a cross-road corner, stretching out its dumb arms to point the way, but not moving a step forward itself. Nay worse, much worse than this. For a sign-post is useful in its way, and does its office well; and if it does not go *forward*, it does not go *back*. But the minister who directs others to heaven, and is not trying in faith, and love, and patience, to go there himself, does go back.

'Cold whilst he kindles others' love,'

he grows harder and more lifeless through his very familiarity with holy things. We ought to pray for ministers that this may never happen to them.

'Blest Jesus, whom Thy servants preach,
Their own Redeemer be,
And watch Thou daily o'er their souls,
That they may watch for Thee!'

But let us remember that we all are in the habit of repeating sound creeds, and joining in holy words of praise and prayer. What if all these leave us as far from God and heaven, as was that unclean spirit who spoke of a way of salvation that he knew nothing of? Let us not think it enough to speak and sing about the Saviour, whilst we *cannot, will not, dare not* say of Him, 'My Lord and my God, in Thee is my hope; Thou art my portion; in Thee do I trust; in Thy steps I will try to walk; let Thy hand lead me in the way of life everlasting.'

ACTS, xvi. 19-25.

19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers.

20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

THE unwilling testimony given by an evil spirit to the Apostle Paul, as being a minister and messenger of Christ, showing to men the way of salvation, only distressed him. It was painful and not pleasing to him to be spoken of, however truly, in such a way by such a witness. He therefore turned and rebuked the unclean spirit, and in the name of Jesus Christ cast it out. The poor damsel was *'the*

same hour’ restored to her right mind ; and may we not well hope that in quite another spirit, and with far different feelings she learnt to say truly and thankfully, ‘ These men are the servants of the most High God, that show unto us the way of salvation.’

‘ *And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace*’ (or rather to the police-court) ‘ *unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.*’ It is impossible to conceive a greater display of falsehood, injustice, and cruelty, than we see in the treatment of Paul and Silas at Philippi. Any one who fairly inquired into the matter might have known that, instead of bringing ‘trouble,’ the preachers of the Gospel brought peace wherever they went ;—they taught no sedition, no rebellion. Themselves possessed of the privileges of Roman citizens, they were of all men least likely to teach customs opposed to the Roman government. However, ‘the servant is not above his master.’ The enemies of our Lord had tried to make out that He set Himself up as a rival king to Cæsar, and now His servants are accused as being ringleaders of rebellion.

A popular tumult was bad enough ; but what shall we say when we see magistrates utterly for-

getting the dignity of their office,—rudely tearing off with their own hands the garments of Paul and Silas,—and then, without any formal trial, commanding that they should be beaten? Most willingly and heartily was the command obeyed. ‘*Many stripes were laid upon them,*’ and they were cast into the common prison. It is of such treatment as this that St. Paul speaks often in his epistles, especially in those to the Corinthians.

We must not think for a moment that St. Paul was a poor, mean-spirited creature, who was not sensitive to shame, cruelty, and injustice. It is a common taunt of men of the world that religion takes away a man’s spirit. Not so. St. Paul was well-born, well-taught, high-spirited, noble and proud by nature; but by the grace of God he was strengthened to bear patiently reproach and shame for Christ’s sake. But he felt, and keenly too, not so much the smarting of the rod and scourge, but public exposure and degradation. In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians he speaks of this very occasion as ‘having been shamefully entreated at Philippi;’ and in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he refers to being made as ‘the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things.’

After Paul and Silas had been unmercifully beaten, they were cast into prison; and, as though they had been the vilest, most daring, and dangerous of criminals, a special charge was given to ‘*the jailor*

to keep them safely.' He (acting as if it had been Barabbas the robber and murderer, instead of Paul the apostle, that had been given to his custody) went to needless lengths of cruelty, thrusting them into an inner cell, and making their feet fast in the stocks.

So there they were ; their backs smarting from the scourge,—their feet galled with iron fetters, and fastened helplessly in the stocks,—their minds oppressed with a sense of the shameful injustice done to them,—with the prospect of even greater dangers and hardships before them,—most of us would have been ready to say if ever two men were objects of pity, they were these.

Yet what is the next thing that we hear of ? '*At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God ; and the prisoners heard them.*' St. Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, says, 'I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.' But as to ourselves, is it not too often the case that we can speak confidently about bearing trial when it is at a distance, but flinch and fail in courage when it actually comes upon us ? We can speak and sing hymns about not being ashamed of Christ and His Gospel,—about bearing our cross after Jesus, and suffering persecution for His sake ; but when it comes to the point, something much lighter than scourge and stocks,—a scoff—a sneer—

a slight loss of earthly gain, will turn us into cowards and traitors. It was otherwise with St. Paul. There was nothing that he ever said about bearing reproaches for Christ's sake that he did not exemplify in his own conduct. In the prison at Philippi, despised, ill-used, fettered, bleeding as he was, he joined with his fellow-preacher and fellow-sufferer in lifting up prayers and songs of praise to God. It is said, '*The prisoners heard them.*' Within those prison-walls had no doubt often been heard moans of pain, oaths, blasphemies, and revilings; but holy songs of praise must have sounded strange indeed in the ears of St. Paul's fellow-prisoners. He and Silas were thrust into the gloomiest cell of that gloomy abode; but through the bolted doors and narrow loopholes came the voices of those two men of God, breaking the midnight stillness, as they sang together perhaps some of David's glorious hymns or others, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for their Master's name. We saw, in the twelfth chapter, Peter calmly *sleeping* in a prison, though chained to two sentinels; here we have Paul *singing* in a prison, with his back bleeding, and his feet fast in the stocks. God 'giveth his beloved sleep' even in the most strange and trying circumstances; He 'giveth songs in the night,' though the night be spent in a prison. (Job, xxxv. 10.) God the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, was with those ill-used preachers of the Gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ

was fulfilling to them His promise that He would be always with them. Therefore had they 'melody in their heaviness;' therefore they could sing songs of Zion in that dark prison.

And thus, in a manner, did those faithful evangelists preach even from their cell; for that strange music might well set all who heard it asking, 'How is this? What new doctrine is this which makes men happy when they might well be expected to be sad.' So the way might well be prepared for a more direct and fuller preaching of the Gospel.

We do not see in these days preachers of the faith beaten and imprisoned. But we may and do see, through God's power and grace, the weak made strong, and sufferers comforted. We hear often hymns of praise where we might naturally expect murmurs and complainings. God still 'giveth songs in the night;' and we see here and there tried and patient Christians, from whose mouths comes no sound but that of trust, hope, and praise. Only let us take Christ as our hope, our refuge, our pattern, and then, even when the cold dark night of death comes down upon us, we shall 'have a song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept,' and pass from faint lisplings of praise here to the full and joyous hallelujahs of heaven.

ACTS, xvi. 26-31.

26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

WE saw Paul and Silas praying and praising in the prison at Philippi. Theirs was a kind of double imprisonment; they were in the inner prison, and even there fastened by their feet in the stocks. If ever two men seemed to be safely secured it was these two. Yet all at once the prison walls shake, the doors are opened, and every fetter loosed. Yet

the key which unlocked those prison-doors was (just as we saw before in the case of Peter's imprisonment) prayer alone. And faithless as we too often are about the efficacy of prayer,—too apt to look upon it as a doubtful venture, an arrow shot in the dark,—it is good for us to have here, as elsewhere, an instance of prayer swiftly, wonderfully answered. It was like touching a secret spring on earth, of which in an instant the effect was felt in heaven, and straightway shown again where the prayer was offered. The prayer, the earthquake, the opened doors, and loosened fetters, were all by unseen links connected together. And now, as ever, men pray, and God hears and helps. If we are not beaten and imprisoned for the Gospel's sake, we cannot escape trials, and we are much mistaken if we think that by the strength of our own resolution, by 'moral courage,' as it is sometimes called, we can bear them calmly and patiently. We can only 'glory in tribulation' through 'the power of Christ resting upon us. We can only sing our songs of praise in hours of darkness by the help of that blessed Comforter, whose grace is to be sought and obtained in humble prayer.

The keeper of the prison at Philippi startled out of his sleep by the earthquake and the bursting open of the prison-doors, came at once, and most naturally, to the conclusion that all his prisoners had escaped. Had this really been the case he knew that he would

have had to pay with his own life the penalty of his apparent neglect. He therefore '*drew out his sword,*' and was just about to kill himself, when '*Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.*'

We must all surely be struck with the kind consideration, the spirit of forgiving love, shown by the Apostle. It is to be feared that many of us would have felt and acted differently. The opened doors would have seemed a call to escape at once; and if the jailor in his terror had killed himself, it is likely we should have felt if not said, '*It serves him right; it is a fit end for a man so hard and cruel.*' But Paul had learnt to '*save life*' if he could; to rescue from death bodies and souls. And it must have made the jailor more ready to receive the truth to hear it from the lips of such a strange prisoner, who did not try to escape when he could, and saved the life of the man by whom he was unjustly kept in prison.

'*Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*' That question, '*What must I do to be saved?*' is the most important and interesting question that any human being can possibly ask. It is the very first question that arises in the heart, and comes to the lips, of a man when he begins to see rightly his sinfulness,—when he feels that he is within an

hair's-breadth of eternity, and without anything to shelter him from the wrath of a justly offended God. 'How can I be saved' from 'the wrath to come,'—from the curse of a broken law,—from the heavy burden of sin which crushes me,—from the bondage of sin,—from its power and pollution?' Have we ever *in good earnest* asked the question? For it is a question not always asked in the same spirit and with the same sincerity with which it was asked by that Philippian jailor. Some ask the question lightly and carelessly, and without waiting for an answer; some ask it without any intention of doing what the answer recommends; some ask it too late, in fear, and doubt, and despair, at the end of a wasted life when God's Spirit is withdrawn, and memory fails, and powers of mind are all but gone. It is to little purpose to ask *such* a question *thus*.

But if earnestly and anxiously, as those whose life depends upon the answer, we ask the question, there comes at once the blessed and ready answer, '*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*' The words contain the sum and substance of the Gospel. They give a sufficient and satisfactory answer to a poor sinner smarting under a sense of sin, trembling under a dread of coming judgment. '*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;*' this is not, 'Believe that there *is* a Lord Jesus Christ,—that the Son of God became for us Jesus

the Saviour,—that the things which the Bible says about His birth, and life, and death, are all true.' It is of course most necessary to believe thus about Christ. We must know who Christ is,—why He came from heaven, and what He came to do, or else we cannot in any way believe in Him to any saving purpose. But then if our faith stops here,—if we get no further,—if we rest in saying, 'All that the Bible says about Christ is true,' what will this profit us? When the Lord Jesus Christ shall come again in power and glory to judge the quick and the dead, will it give any man peace and comfort to say, 'This is He who came into the world to save sinners, and yet through my sin and unbelief I am not saved;—I knew him to be the Son of God, and yet I did not honour Him;—I knew Him to be the only refuge for sinners, yet I did not trust in Him, nor confess Him?'

'*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ;*' this according to the teaching of the Bible is,—to feel sin to be a curse, a shame, a burden, and to look to Christ for its forgiveness,—to know the soul to be unspeakably precious, and to intrust it to Christ to be kept safe for eternity,—to rest upon Christ all our hopes and expectations of everlasting life,—to rely upon Him as a child relies upon a loving father; and then, knowing and feeling that every mercy, every blessing, every hope,—light in death and joy throughout

eternity,—all come from Christ alone, to be drawn to Him by strongest ties of love and thankfulness. May such a faith as this be ours, and may it grow, and ripen, and strengthen, until we know as we are known and see as we are seen!

ACTS, xvi. 32-34.

32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

WE saw what was the answer given by Paul and Silas to the anxious question of the trembling Philippian jailor. The words, '*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,*' contain, as we saw, the sum and substance of the Gospel; they are, as it were, the kernel of it; a gospel in miniature,—a condensed Gospel. They are words of life and power such as can be quickly spoken to the terrified, the conscience-stricken, the dying. But of course those blessed words may be greatly expanded. There is much flowing out of them, and connected with them; and Paul and Silas having answered promptly and decisively the anxious question of the jailor, went on to '*speak (more fully) unto him the word of*

the Lord, and to all that were in his house.' And as the man listened to things new, and strange, and sweet, his faith grew, his hopes revived, his fears vanished, and peace in believing filled his heart.

And then sprang up those good and sure fruits of a living faith,—pity, love, and tenderness. Paul and Silas had been beaten cruelly, and cast into prison with a special charge given to the jailor to keep them safely. The man carried out his orders with needless severity. He thrust his prisoners into the darkest cell, and there made their feet fast in the stocks. This looks very much as if he had been more than commonly hard and unfeeling. Now, however, all was changed. He took his ill-used prisoners, washed their stripes, brought them into his house, and set meat before them. Possibly from prisoners so despised and hardly treated as they had been, even the poor, meagre prison-fare had been kept back; at any rate a different kind of meal, we may be very sure, was set before them in the penitent jailor's house.

But this was not all. Respect and compassion shown towards God's ministers,—a desire to remedy in some measure their cruel wrongs,—an eager listening to the preached Gospel,—faith newly springing up in the man's soul;—all this was known only to Paul and Silas, and the jailor's own family, and of course to God. There must still be something more than this. For as Paul says, 'With the heart

man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' Accordingly we are told of the jailor, that '*he was baptized, he and all his straightway.*' This was in exact obedience to one of our Saviour's last commands. By the sacrament of baptism those who were converted from heathenism or any other form of ungodliness were to be admitted into the Church of Christ. Thus, then, was the Philippian jailor (he and all his) gathered into the household of faith. But when he thus witnessed a good confession, let us not lose sight of the danger which he incurred, the persecution and loss to which he would most assuredly have to submit. In all likelihood he would soon have to change places with his prisoners. And for a man who had just been helping to beat and imprison Christ's messengers to turn round and say, 'I will be *with* them and *for* them; their God shall be my God; their people my people; their home my home;'—this was a great and bold thing to do, and proved the man's faith to be real, and strong, and true. He might suffer much and lose much, but none of these things moved him; he believed and therefore would he speak, confessing Christ, whose name a little while back was hateful to him, as his Lord and King.

And he was not alone in his faith and confession. The leaven spread. To the jailor and all his house-

hold did Paul and Silas preach the word; all received it in faith and all were baptized. Some have thought and said, that this case of the baptizing of the whole family of the Philippian jailor gives a sanction to infant baptism; for that it is most likely some of the members of his family were of very tender age. But besides the fact that we do not *know* this to have been the case, and so it is mere conjecture, we are told that 'he with all his house *believed*,' and of course this could not be said of infants. And we have plenty of good reasons why infants should be baptized, without being driven to mere guesses to support our argument. The fact that infants were brought into covenant with God, under the Old Testament dispensation, by circumcision,—the practice of the Christian Church from the days of the apostles,—the loving words of Christ when He bade little children to be brought to Him;—these are reasons amply sufficient to satisfy us that 'our heavenly Father favourably alloweth our charitable work in bringing infants to His holy baptism.'

It is further said of the jailor that '*he rejoiced*.' This again looks like the fruit of a very genuine faith. For to look at the matter in a mere worldly point of view the man had little indeed to rejoice at. He would be certain to lose his situation, the good opinion of his friends, and possibly even his

life. Yet he rejoiced. And why should he not? He had found a treasure, the pearl of great price; he had lost a heavy burden, the burden of unforgiven sin; he had learnt how to get rid of fears and doubts; he had discovered how the sting could be taken from death, and its victory from the grave; he had found out how he might have confidence and not be ashamed when brought face to face with the Judge of quick and dead;—and all because now for the first time he had come to know and trust in Christ as his Saviour. So he had ‘joy’ as well as ‘peace’ in believing; he ‘rejoiced in the Lord;’ ‘rejoiced in Christ Jesus;’ ‘rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.’

If we have very little of such joy, it surely must be because our faith is sadly weak and our love sadly cold; we walk too much by sight, too little by faith. Perhaps we are slack in prayer, careless in the use of the means of grace. Perhaps what we profess to believe we neglect to practise. We must remember that whilst works *show* faith they also *strengthen* it. Believing and doing act and re-act the one on the other. The stronger our faith the better will be our lives, and the better our lives the more will our faith grow and be established. Let us pray, ‘Lord, increase our faith;’ and meanwhile let us honestly try by God’s grace and help to practise what we believe and know. And may the Holy Spirit shed

abroad within us more of that holy fervour which filled the heart of St. Peter when he said, speaking of his Divine Master, ' Whom having not seen we love, in whom though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

ACTS, xvi. 35-40.

35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.

36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go : now therefore depart, and go in peace.

37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison ; and now do they thrust us out privily ? nay verily ; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates : and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia : and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

‘When it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.’ Strange reports had no doubt reached the ears of those unjust and cruel rulers, about the earthquake, and the opening of the prison-doors, and the wonderful fact that no one of the prisoners had taken advantage of that opening to escape. Something, too, no doubt, was whispered of a great change which had taken place in

the jailor's thoughts and manner, and of his altered treatment of two of his prisoners. So there came over the minds of those magistrates some sore misgivings; and they thought it wiser and safer to discharge those strange and troublesome prisoners without any further inquiry. Accordingly, *'the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go; now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out.'* Now this passage of Scripture shows us most plainly that there are occasions upon which Christians are perfectly justified—indeed called upon—for the truth's sake, to assert their rights, to protest against injustice, to demand that due satisfaction be made for wrong done. It is quite true that our Saviour Christ bade His disciples, if smitten on one cheek to turn to the smiter the other; and that St. Paul bids the Corinthian Christians rather to 'take wrong' than to resent it. At the same time let us not forget that Christ Himself, when smitten on the cheek, said to him who smote him, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?' St. Paul himself, too, when the high-priest Ananias commanded that he should be smitten on the mouth whilst protesting his innocence, said, 'God shall smite thee, thou whited wall;

for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?' And so now, when he was about to be smuggled without a trial out of a prison, into which in defiance of all law and justice he had been shamefully thrust, the Apostle said, 'Nay verily, let them come themselves and fetch us out.'

All kinds of errors and heresies have sprung up from time to time from not taking the Bible just as it is in all its breadth and largeness. We are apt often to fasten upon one set of texts which seem to teach one truth, and to overlook meanwhile other passages which greatly qualify, explain, or even correct them. David says, 'Thy commandment is exceeding broad.' *General principles* are laid down in the Bible clearly enough; particular applications of them may differ. There is a time for yielding, and a time for standing firm; a time for 'taking wrong,' and a time for remonstrance, and even resistance. Prayer to God for wisdom will secure for us such heavenly guidance, that in trying and difficult circumstances we shall perceive and know what things we ought to do.

St. Paul's words being reported to the magistrates filled them with anxiety and alarm. They felt that they had committed an act which if known at Rome would bring them into disgrace and danger. The privileges of a Roman citizen were great. To beat or otherwise injure a citizen of Rome, espe-

cially when untried, and therefore, of course uncondemned, was a crime for which the least punishment would be loss of power and office. The magistrates hastened therefore to the prison, and bringing them out of it, earnestly '*besought*' them to '*depart out of the city.*' We seem to be reminded by the words of that scene in the country of the Gergesenes, when, after our blessed Lord had cast out a legion of devils from two possessed of them, the people, vexed and terrified on account of the loss of their swine whom the devils had been permitted to enter, '*besought*' Jesus '*to depart out of their coasts.*' So here again at Philippi Paul had cast out in the name of Jesus Christ a spirit of divination from a poor afflicted damsel. And then, by the instrumentality of the Apostle and his faithful companion, a miracle of mercy had been wrought in the saving of the Philippian jailor and his family. These men had been shown to be the greatest possible benefactors. They brought, after the example of their Divine Master, blessings to men's bodies and souls. And yet those whom they sought to benefit and bless were only anxious to be rid of their presence, as the Gergesenes sought to be rid of Jesus. How many in these days imitate such sad examples! Christ is always seeking to benefit and bless us, to heal and help us. But too many say, if not in so many words, at least by their actions, '*Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.*' And this is, being

sick to scorn a Healer, being bound to make light of a Deliverer.

St. Paul and Silas, when entreated to leave the prison and the city, came forth, and went to the house of Lydia, where before they had been hospitably received, and there, a small gathering of the brethren having been made, '*they comforted them.*' We can easily conceive in what manner they would do this. For they could tell them of all that just happened,—would show them how God made 'the wrath of man to praise Him,' for that their imprisonment had led to the conversion of the jailor and his house,—would tell them of the earthquake and opened doors of the prison which testified of God's interference on behalf of His servants, and thus would exhort them to 'endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,' relying upon the promised care and protection of Him, the great Captain of their salvation. From such considerations may we too draw comfort in tribulation, and strength for the fulfilment of every needful duty.

ACTS, xvii. 1-7.

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews :

2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures,

3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

7 Whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, that there is another king, one Jesus.

THERE is always something interesting in looking at the first beginning of any great and success-

ful enterprise. We have in the verses which we have just read an account of the origin of that Church of the Thessalonians, of which St. Paul wrote so favourably and thankfully in his two letters written to it only a year and a half after he first preached the Gospel among them. Having been 'shamefully entreated' at Philippi, and yet having left behind him there good seed to ripen soon into a plentiful harvest, the Apostle and his companion, Silas, took their journey through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica.

There St. Paul pursued his usual plan of entering into the synagogue of the Jews, and reasoning with them out of the Scriptures. For three Sabbath-days in succession he carried on his argument; pointing out how the Old Testament prophecies, types, and promises, found their full accomplishment in the work, ministry, and death of Jesus of Nazareth; that Christ must needs have suffered and risen from the dead; and that the Saviour whom he preached to them was the Messiah of prophecy and promise,—the Anointed One,—the appointed Redeemer of mankind.

'*Christ must needs have suffered.*' Our blessed Lord Himself, in reasoning with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, said to them, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: *ought not Christ to have suffered these things,*

and to enter into His glory?' And again, to all His disciples gathered together in Jerusalem, he said, 'Thus it is written, and *thus it behoved Christ to suffer*, and to rise from the dead the third day.' St. Paul, then, was only following up and echoing his Divine Master's words.

But after all, why '*must Christ have suffered?*' No doubt it was all necessary that the Scriptures might be fulfilled—that Gospel promises might be accomplished—that the covenant made between the Father and the Son, by which the Son undertook to work out man's redemption might not be broken. All this we can easily see and understand. We know that 'His covenant God will not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of His lips.' But then, why did God the Father thus lay upon Himself, as it were, the necessity of accomplishing words which spoke aforetime of Christ's sufferings and death? And why did Christ Himself accept that necessity? We must come back for an answer to the fountain-head of all. Love led the Father to put Himself under the necessity of giving His Son for man. Love led Jesus to put Himself under the necessity of coming to earth to die. It is quite true that '*Christ must needs suffer*,' that the Scripture might not be broken. But then that the promise should be given,—that the covenant should be made,—for this there was no necessity beyond that

which might be said to exist in the constraining power of infinite, unfathomable love,—love to sinners,—love to us.

It was just the same with regard to the result of St. Paul's preaching in the synagogue at Thessalonica that it has always been with regard to the preaching of the Gospel, even by the first and greatest of preachers. Some believed and attached themselves to Paul and Silas; amongst whom were a large number of proselytes to the Jewish religion from amongst the Gentiles, and not a few women of superior rank and station. Others, again, in stubborn unbelief refused to receive the truth. And these, gathering together a company of idle loungers about the streets, raised a tumult and attacked the house of Jason, in which St. Paul and Silas were hospitably received, and sought to drag them forth to the people. *'And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, that there is another king, one Jesus.'*

'These that have turned the world upside down; even the devil speaks the truth sometimes. In the sixteenth chapter we saw a damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, exclaiming of Paul and Silas, 'These men are the servants of the Most High God,

which show unto us the way of salvation.' The unclean spirits whom our Lord rebuked and cast out, were forced to acknowledge of Him, 'We know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God.' And now here, these wicked Jews who were doing the devil's work in hindering the preaching of the Gospel, yet spoke a true word when they said that those who did preach it faithfully were '*turning the world upside down.*'

Amongst the Thessalonians, during St. Paul's short ministry amongst them there was a marvellous stir and change. Many amongst them, as the Apostle writes in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, 'turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.' It was indeed, and ever will be, the great work of Christ and all the preachers of His Gospel to 'turn the world upside down;' to set men on a completely altered course of life,—to make them look at things in a perfectly new way,—leading them to hate what before they loved, and to follow what before they avoided.

We cannot take up a single report of missionary work but we see the world being 'turned upside down' by the faithful preaching of the Gospel of Christ. We see men flinging their idols to the moles and the bats; we see savage men becoming gentle, and cruel men kind; we hear God's praises

sung where nothing was heard before but shouts of war and groans of pain. We are bad enough in England now, but there were days when things were vastly worse; for here in our dear native land heathen gods were worshipped, and cruel rites were practised before their shrines. There has been much turning of things upside down amongst us.

Whilst, however, we see and own thankfully great changes in countries and nations, let us not forget to look within. St. Paul says, 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are past away, and all things are become new.' Is there any such turning things upside down in us?

Those unbelieving Jews spoke scornfully of '*another king*' besides Cæsar, '*one Jesus.*' We know how utterly false was the charge of doing contrary to the decrees of Cæsar; for Christ Himself bade that the things of Cæsar should be rendered unto him, and St. Paul bade that every soul should be subject to the higher powers. But the saying about another king, one Jesus, was, like the charge of turning the world upside down, in one sense quite true. There *is* such a King; once crowned with thorns, now crowned with light, and power, and glorious majesty. Is He the King of our hearts? Have we enthroned Him there? Other lords have had dominion over us; now *who* and *what* reigns within? He must

reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet. Before He comes 'to shake terribly the earth,'—to take to Himself His great power and reign, King of kings and Lord of lords,—may we bow willingly beneath His sceptre, and find shelter beneath His cross !

ACTS, xvii. 8-12.

8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea : who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

12 Therefore many of them believed ; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

THE accusation brought against St. Paul and his friends, that they were turning the world upside down, and setting up another king in opposition to Cæsar, greatly disturbed the people and the rulers of Thessalonica. The latter, evidently puzzled as to the best way of dealing with a case so new and strange, and to them so incomprehensible, bound over Jason and his friends to keep the peace, and let the preachers of the Gospel go. They, obeying their Lord's command, 'If they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another,' were sent away by the

brethren, under cover of the darkness of the night, to Berea. There, nothing daunted by the hard usage they had met with at Philippi and Thessalonica, they pursued their old plan of going into the synagogue of the Jews to preach the Gospel. The conduct of the Bereans is said to have presented in some respects a marked contrast to that of many of the Thessalonians. They are said to have been '*more noble*' (the word means more candid, more free from prejudice) '*than those of Thessalonica.*' They showed their candour by '*receiving the word with all readiness of mind.*' Our Lord, in His parable of the sower, speaks of the seed sown on good ground as representing those who 'hear the word and *receive it*, and bring forth fruit; some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.' '*Receiving the word*' is a different thing from listening to it. If a field be hard and heavy, and its surface unbroken, it cannot be said to '*receive*' the seed scattered upon it. The seed might be good, and the sower diligent; but that which was sown, lying only on the surface, would soon be plucked away by the birds, or trodden under the feet of passengers. And this is only a picture of that which is continually going on with regard to the hearing of God's word. From mere habit,—or to quiet their consciences,—or to keep up a good appearance,—or because others do so,—many go to hear the Gospel preached, or take up now and then their Bibles. But to what purpose? Is there

any desire really to know God's will, or any intention, when it is known, to do it? Is there any kind of expectation of being in any way altered by what is heard or read? Will any one sin be watched and prayed against when it is found to be condemned? Will any one duty be done when it is known that God commands it? Too often the mere hearing and reading are all. Men do not 'receive' the word at all. They *endure* the truth, but do not *embrace* it; *submit* to it, but do not *obey* it. Let us remember that the word which is not a 'savour of life' becomes a 'savour of death.' The water which nourishes a living tree makes a lifeless stump decay more quickly. The gospel of God's grace heard from time to time in vain increases the guilt, and hastens the ruin, of those who so hear it.

But, besides '*receiving the word with all readiness of mind,*' it is said further of the Bereans that they '*searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*' We have seen, in the previous chapters of this book, that it was the habit of the first preachers of the Gospel to refer continually to the Old Testament Scriptures, and to take texts for their discourses out of them. No doubt St. Paul did this in the synagogue of Berea; and they to whom he preached searched the Scriptures to see if what he said corresponded with what was written. Even though it were an Apostle who preached to them, they did not take all that he said for granted, but

searched carefully to see if the words of the *written* record squared with the words of the living preacher,—if things were really as they were represented to be. Are the Bereans condemned for this? Are they considered presumptuous for acting thus? Far from it. They are praised and not blamed; spoken of as being ‘*noble*,’ candid, unprejudiced, and not as being arrogant and unteachable. The best and happiest consequences too followed their careful search after truth, for it is said, ‘*Therefore many of them believed.*’

The Church of Rome, indeed, shuts up the Bible from the common people, and says, ‘Take all for granted that we tell you,—hear the Church;’ which means, ‘Hear your priest, who will tell you as much of what the Church says as he knows and pleases.’ But true ministers of Christ *do not, dare not*, say so. On the contrary, they say, ‘Take what we tell you to your Bibles;—look and see if what you *hear* agrees with what you *read*,—if what *we* say agrees with what *God* says. “To the law and to the testimony; if we speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in us.”’ (Isa. viii. 20.)

Only there is this to be borne in mind. The things which Christ’s ministers preach about are not mere trifles,—not matters of small importance,—not questions which any one may think about or not just as it pleases them. No man has a right to say that it is likely a minister speaks the truth, but that

he put things too strongly, and that at any rate he cannot trouble himself to look into the Bible to see if the minister is right or wrong. If the minister speaks what is not true, let the Bible be searched, and by it let the untruth be discovered. But if he speaks the truth, then the word is not his, but God's; and it is a very dangerous and sinful thing to deal with the word spoken as if it were of no kind of importance. Ministers sometimes say strong things, but the Bible says still stronger. We should take words of solemn warning to God's Word, and see if the most faithful watchman has too earnestly and plainly warned the careless, faithless, and impenitent, to 'flee from the wrath to come.' But we hear also words of gracious promise and invitation. It seems a bold thing for any man to say to his fellow-sinners, 'You can have every stain of sin washed out;—you can have strength given you to enable you to overcome temptation;—if weary you can have rest;—and for the future, beyond the grave and its darkness, you can have joy and glory for evermore.' When we hear such good things we should test them by what the Bible says. We all know how the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel warrant Christ's ministers in saying all this and much more.

The Bereans searched the Scriptures '*daily*.' They did not, like some, think God's word fit only

for the Sabbath. They made it their daily counsellor. If we *receive* the word *preached*, and *search* the word *written* as they did, how surely will our profiting appear to all men, and the Gospel preached or written, be unto us 'the power of God unto salvation.'

ACTS, xvii. 13-21.

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

WE saw the happy result of the candid reception which the people of Berea gave to the word preached by St. Paul. '*Many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.*'

However, as there never was good seed sown without the enemy coming in to sow tares, we read that '*when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the Word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.*' Once again, then, St. Paul's friends, anxious for his safety, thought it prudent to urge his departure; and Silas and Timotheus being left behind for a little while to carry on the good work begun, the apostle was conducted by those who had accompanied him to Athens.

Athens was at that time the most literary city of Greece,—the very centre of learning, civilization, and refinement. Wise men (as they were considered) taught there, and philosophers disputed. We have now, even in these days, books, and statues, and remains of temples, which testify of the height to which art and learning had advanced in Athens. And yet those who 'professed themselves to be wise' became, as St. Paul says, 'fools,' 'changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.' (Rom. i. 22, 23.) And of Athens,—enlightened, polished Athens,—with its

schools of learning,—its philosophers and teachers,—its poets and sculptors,—its splendid temples, and other public buildings,—its laws, and arts, and sciences, the words of the prophet were strictly true, ‘Their land is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: and the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself.’ (Isa. ii. 8, 9.)

What were the feelings of St. Paul when he found himself amongst such a people? If he had been a man of the same mind as many in these days, he would have contented himself with looking about him at all the objects of interest around, as travellers commonly do; and when idols and idol temples met his view, he would have said, ‘It is no business of mine how these people worship God; let them do so in the way they think best; if they are sincere in their religion, of whatever kind it is, that is enough.’ This was not the way in which St. Paul felt and reasoned. He who spoke ‘even weeping’ of those who are ‘enemies of the cross of Christ,’ could not look round unmoved upon a city, however great and refined, yet at the same time ‘*wholly given to idolatry.*’ ‘*His spirit was stirred within him.*’ He remembered that plain command of his Lord, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;’ he bore in mind, too, the solemn charge and commission given to himself after his conversion, ‘I send thee unto the Gentiles, to open their eyes, and

to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ;' he knew that, as his brother apostle Peter had said, 'There is salvation in none other' than in the Lord Jesus Christ, for that 'there is none other name under heaven given amongst men whereby they may be saved.' And knowing this, all the glories of Athens, all her treasures of art and learning, were as nothing in his eyes. He thought of souls perishing,—of Christ crucified for them, and yet not known by them,—of eternity hastening on,—of death and judgment,—and he wept, and prayed, and laboured, if by any means he might save some.

Mindful of our Lord's instructions to the first preachers of the Gospel that they should begin at Jerusalem, St. Paul, according to his usual plan, went first to the Jews, and in the synagogue reasoned with them, and with proselytes to the Jewish religion. Then next in the market he conversed with those whom he met day by day ; and then further, encountering some philosophers of the Epicureans and Stoics, he feared not to tell them of things which in their eyes were foolishness, but which, rightly received and understood, are the power of God unto man's salvation. As to the Epicureans, they were practically Atheists. They taught that the world came together by chance ;—that God had nothing to do with the government of it ;—that the soul was not immortal ;—that death

needed all ;—and so, said they, ‘ Let us eat and drink and please ourselves, for to-morrow we die.’ As to the Stoics, they taught that God was in everything and everything was God ;—that there was no such thing as sin, for that what every man did was what he could not help doing ; and that the height of excellence was, not to feel or to express feeling of any kind. Amongst such as these the apostle came, preaching Jesus and the resurrection,—telling of man’s responsibility, and man’s fall, and the way of his recovery through Christ.

How was the apostle’s teaching received ? Some said, ‘ What will this babbler ’—this talker about nothing—‘ say ?’ Others, hearing the two words *JESUS*’ and the *‘ RESURRECTION ’* often repeated, fancied that these were two new gods whose names might perhaps be added with advantage to their long list of idols. So they brought the apostle to Areopagus, the highest court of Athens, and asked him what the doctrine he was teaching really was. Much of all this anxiety to know what he taught arose, as St. Luke explains, from mere curiosity,—from a restless inquisitiveness which kept the Athenians on the stir, telling or hearing some new thing. Utter contempt then,—ignorant misunderstanding,—idle curiosity,—such were the feelings with which St. Paul’s message was received. We have a striking comment upon it all in one of St. Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. i. 18–29.)

We have men in these days who treat the Gospel with contempt,—who affect to know more of God's works than God Himself,—who cavil, and question, and doubt. To them the truths of the Bible are as old wives' fables,—things beneath the notice of men of sense. On the other hand there is an eager thirst for news; and many, like those Athenians, waste days and months in 'hearing and telling some new thing.' And yet how soon will busy tongues be silenced, and ears open to every new tale be stopt by the dust of death! May God, of His great mercy, keep us all from the sin and folly of idling away our lives in empty tattle,—opening our ears to everything but that which is most worth hearing about,—and so slighting Jesus and His great salvation!

ACTS, xvii. 22-31.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ;

25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ;

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation ;

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us :

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being ; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent :

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

IN considering St. Paul's famous sermon addressed to the men of Athens, it may be well to notice a little first the place where it was delivered. 'Paul,' we read, '*stood in the midst of Mars' hill.*' This was an eminence in the very heart of the city of Athens. On a bench of stone in the open air sat the members of the high court of Areopagus, and the apostle stood before them. From that high position, and without any overhanging roof to break the view, he could look round on the statues, altars, and temples, with which the city was crowded. Before him,—behind him,—on every side, were magnificent temples, of some of which the ruins remain to this day ; whilst almost overshadowing him was a monstrous bronze image of the goddess Minerva, who was supposed to be the protectress of Athens,—a splendid work of art,—as much revered as admired by the Athenians. Here it was, that with wonderful courage and faithfulness St. Paul stood up, to show to those who vainly worshipped the work of their hands a more excellent way. '*Ye men of Athens,*' he began, '*I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.*' The meaning

of the words rather is, 'I see that you have amongst you a greater number of gods whom you worship than other cities have.' '*For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions,*'—your temples,—your altars and acts of worship—'*I found an altar with this inscription, To THE UNKNOWN GOD.*' After multiplying their temples, altars, and statues, to a great extent, 'having lords many, and gods many,' these Athenians, fearful lest they should have left out any God whom it was important to worship, set up one altar more, dedicated '*to the Unknown God,*'—to him, by whatever name he may be called, to whom we have as yet paid no worship and built no altar. This strange inscription St. Paul took as the text of his sermon: '*Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.*' And then the apostle went on to speak of God as the great Creator of the world and all things therein; the Lord of heaven and earth, by whose wisdom and power all nations were made of one blood; by whose providential government the times for the rising and falling of kingdoms, and the tracts of country to be peopled, were before appointed.

'It is not reasonable,' the apostle argues, 'to suppose that the Lord, the maker and the owner of heaven and earth, should be in any way confined to earthly temples, however costly and magnificent, such as I see around me. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is

my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made." (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.) Nor let it be thought that He who is the owner of all things '*needs*' men's gifts and offerings. For what again saith He? 'I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.' (Ps. l. 9, 10, 12.) By the works of creation, and by the appointments of His providence, God leads men to seek after Him if haply they may find Him. Not that any need go far to seek Him, for He is close to every one of us: '*In Him we live, and move, and have our being.*' Even heathen poets and philosophers, ignorant as they were of the true God, have felt and said that man was the offspring of one who was above him, but ever near him. Now of such a being, it is foolish to think that He can be '*like images of gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*' Shall that which is without life be supposed to represent the very fountain of life Himself? Shall something which man has made be thought to figure forth man's Maker? Long indeed has darkness covered the earth; and in times past God, in great measure, '*winked at,*' or overlooked, days of ignorance. He left not Himself indeed without

witness ; but the light was dim at best. Now upon them that sat in darkness light is sprung up ; and God *winks at* ignorance no more, but '*commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*' And this all the more, because there is a day fixed when God *will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained,*' even by Him who whilst the Son of Man is also the Son of God ; of whose appointment as future Judge of quick and dead God has given an assurance in raising Him from the dead.

Such seems to be the substance of St. Paul's sermon. We do not need, like those Athenians, any argument to convince us of the folly of likening the Godhead to images of gold, and silver, and stone, graven by art and man's device. But do we all realise those truths which we are so ready to acknowledge ; that we are God's workmanship,—God's property ; that He alone gives us life, and breath, and all things ; that He is not far from every one of us, 'compassing our path, and our lying down, and being acquainted with all our ways ?' Surely if we deeply felt when we arose in the morning, 'I cannot draw a breath except God enables me ; I cannot walk a step except God gives me strength to do so ; I belong wholly to Him,—my hands, my feet, my eyes, my ears, are all His ;' and 'He that planted the ear shall He not hear ? He that formed the eye shall He not see ?' Surely if such thoughts oftener occupied our minds, we should 'take more

heed to our ways that we offended not with our tongues;’ we should not run so heedlessly into temptation; we should be more watchful, and more anxious to please our Creator and Preserver. Would any man swear profanely, or tell a wilful lie, if he saw a bright angel standing at his side? And yet God, the Lord of angels, is closer to us than any angel can be.

‘God commandeth *all men everywhere* to repent;’ and therefore commands us to do so. Have we not much to repent of? Much because we have so often and so sadly forgotten our Maker, and more, —far more,—because having been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ we have so shamefully and unthankfully forgotten our Redeemer. Well indeed might we look forward with dread to the great appointed day when God shall judge the world, were it not for the hope the Gospel brings. ‘*He shall judge the world in righteousness by that MAN whom He hath ordained.*’ ’ ‘God,’ said our Lord Himself, hath given unto the Son ‘authority to execute judgment, because *He is the Son of Man.*’ There is great mercy, as well as wisdom in the arrangement. For now the Christian, sincere though imperfect, can think of the future Judge of quick and dead as one who can be touched with the feeling of his infirmities,—who hungered, thirsted, wept, and died,—who shall for ever bear in His glorified person the wound-prints which tell

of His boundless love. When He shall come again in His power and majesty, may His voice of love welcome us as those who have known and loved Him, and not His terrors make us afraid as those who have dishonoured and forgotten Him.

ACTS, xvii. 32-34 ; xviii. 1-3.

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked : and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

33 So Paul departed from among them.

34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed : among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Chap. xviii. 1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth ;

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla ; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) : and came unto them.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought : for by their occupation they were tent-makers.

LET us look for a moment at the effect of St. Paul's sermon delivered before the high court of Areopagus at Athens. He had spoken of Christ as having been ordained by God the future Judge of quick and dead ; and had declared that God had

given to all men an assurance of His having been appointed to that high office in His resurrection from the dead. Now that the dead should be raised,—that the body once dissolved in death should be built up again,—this was a doctrine denied by all alike of those heathen philosophers. They might differ in many things, but in this all were agreed that they thought it ‘a thing incredible’ that the dead should be raised. ‘Some,’ accordingly when they heard St. Paul speak of the resurrection, ‘mocked, and others (their curiosity perhaps excited) said, *We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them.*’ He very shortly left Athens, never as far as we know to visit it again.

Here, however, as elsewhere, St. Paul’s ministry was not altogether without fruit. ‘*Certain men clave unto him, and believed; among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.*’ So then even amongst his judges the heart of one was touched. This Dionysius is said, in ancient ecclesiastical history, to have been afterwards the first Bishop of Athens, and Damaris to have been his wife. Others, too, were convinced by the apostle’s words. He might have to complain as to many of his hearers, ‘Who hath believed our report?’ but here, as in other scenes of his labours, there was good seed sown, and the foundation laid of a Christian church.

From Athens St. Paul went to Corinth, a great

and flourishing mercantile city not many miles distant. Corinth was a city noted for its luxury and its wickedness. Here the apostle found himself alone, for Silas and Timotheus, who had been left at Berea, had not yet come to him as he had requested them to do. He found, however, a friend in one Aquila, a Jew, who when Claudius had driven all Jews out of Rome, had taken refuge at Corinth. With this man and his wife Priscilla, a common occupation brought St. Paul acquainted. We must suppose that Aquila and Priscilla already knew and had embraced the truth of the Gospel, though they would no doubt gain much instruction, and be confirmed in the faith by their intercourse with the apostle Paul. At the end of this chapter we see that Aquila and Priscilla were of much use to Apollos, in 'expounding to him the way of God more perfectly than he had known it.' No doubt their superior light and knowledge were gained in great measure from daily intercourse for some time with St. Paul.

There was nothing discreditable in the eyes of a Jew in manual labour. It was the custom of those days that all young Jews, of whatever rank and position, should learn some trade or business by which, if needful, they might support themselves. To this wise custom St. Paul was no exception. Though a learned man, brought up under one of the most celebrated of teachers, and, as far

as we know, by no means of a needy family, the apostle, like others of his countrymen, had learnt a trade,—in his case it was that of tent-making,—in the practice of which he could support himself by the labour of his own hands. And well it was that he had done so. For when he became a disciple of Christ, and a preacher of His Gospel, he gave up all earthly prospects and possessions. He would, of course, be at once disowned by his Jewish relatives and friends. He forsook all when he began to follow Christ. And now here he found himself in a strange city, without any means of support but such as his own labour could procure. No man spoke more plainly and strongly than St. Paul as to the duty of the churches to provide for the temporal wants of those who ministered to them ‘the word of life.’ But then as yet there was no Church in Corinth; it was yet to be formed. At the beginning therefore of his great and good work in that city, St. Paul had to labour with his hands to gain a livelihood. And even when he might have asked support from his converts, he was very often glad to forego his claims in order to take away all occasion from those who were ready to think and speak evil of the Gospel and its preachers. Very frequently does the apostle refer to this, especially in his Epistles to the Thessalonians. Those were days of danger, rebuke, and blasphemy. St. Paul would not be ‘burdensome’ to his converts;

he would not exact what he felt to be his due; he would give no man occasion to say that he was idle and mercenary, that he cared more for the fleece than the flock.

There is something very beautiful and interesting in the view given us of the great apostle engaged in tent-making. For one thing it shows us plainly that there is nothing to be ashamed of in hard work. From the very first labour was God's appointment. Before sin came into the world,—before man fell, there was labour of some kind. God put Adam into the Garden of Eden 'to dress it and to keep it.' Sin brought a curse into the world, and so pain, and fatigue, and sorrow became mixed up with labour; but in labour itself there is nothing disgraceful; far otherwise. Some have to work with their heads, and others with their hands; but some kind of labour is wholesome, honourable, and needful for all. 'In all labour there is profit;' whilst idleness is the root of a thousand sorrows and sins. Even our blessed Lord Himself, that pure and perfect pattern of all that man should be, wrought with His own hands as a carpenter in a workshop at Nazareth.

It must, for some reasons, have been peculiarly irksome to St. Paul to have had to labour with his hands as he did at Corinth. His whole soul was filled with a desire to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. He must have grudged every hour

spent in other work. And yet there might be seen this great and holy man,—well born, well educated, learned, and wise,—full of love to Christ, and zeal for the salvation of souls, sitting in his workshop, working often far into the night,—stitching hides of leather together, shaping them into a proper form, measuring the cords, sharpening the stakes. In this, as in everything else, St. Paul's energy showed itself. He 'wrought with labour and travail night and day.' He not only maintained himself, but had also something to spare for the necessities of others.

We can well believe that whilst St. Paul and his companions were busy at their work, many a pleasant thought and word about Jesus of Nazareth would help to cheer their toil. And when the Sabbath came all work was laid aside and the Gospel preached in the synagogue.

Often, as we know, St. Paul was enabled to work great miracles, but we have no reason to think he had always that power. Special faith for special signs and wonders was given. And when means could be used God would not work miracles. God could have fed St. Paul as he fed Elijah; or have enabled the apostle to multiply stores as Elisha multiplied the widow's barrel of meal. He *could*, but he *did* not. In spiritual things, as well as in earthly things, we are carefully to use means, and not to wait idly for miracles. No man need be

ungodly because he has to work hard. Whilst his hands are busy his heart may be lifted up to God. On the other hand, as in the concerns of daily life, 'if a man will not work neither shall he eat,' so in things of greater moment, if we will not watch, and fight, and pray, we must look for no miracle to *force* us to heaven. We are to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling,' all the more because we know that 'it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.'

ACTS, xviii. 4-6.

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

WE have read of St. Paul reasoning every Sabbath in the synagogue at Corinth with Jews and Greeks. After a time he was joined by his faithful companions, Silas and Timotheus, whom he had left at Berea; and when they were come, *'Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.'*

Silas and Timotheus brought the apostle a supply of money from the brethren in Macedonia. This we learn from St. Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians, in which the apostle says, 'When I was present with you and wanted, I was chargeable to no man; for that which was lacking to me the

brethren which came from Macedonia supplied.' (2 Cor. xi. 9.)

After the arrival, then, of his friends, St. Paul was able to give himself up more entirely to the work of preaching the Gospel. And he '*was pressed in spirit*' to do so. It was with him as with the prophet Jeremiah of old. 'I am in derision daily,' complained the prophet, 'every one mocketh me.' Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name.' It was useless; the fire was kindled and the tongue must speak. 'But,' adds Jeremiah, 'His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.' (Jer. xx. 9.) So it was with St. Paul. Constrained by the love of Christ, burning with zeal to make Him known, he '*testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.*' His testimony was received with opposition and blasphemy; and, shaking his raiment as a sign of holy indignation, he said, '*Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*' Much in the same way had the apostle spoken to blaspheming Jews at Antioch in Pisidia. (chap. xiii. 46.) Like language he afterwards used to Jews at Rome. (chap. xxviii. 28.)

A great and blessed thing it is for us, that now the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile is broken down; and that now to us Gentiles are preached, at God's command, the unsearchable

riches of Christ. We must not, however, overlook the solemn words of St. Paul addressed to those unbelieving Jews at Corinth; '*Your blood be* (or rather it should be "*is*") *on your own heads; I am clean.*' In the twentieth chapter, in his address to the elders of Ephesus, the apostle says, 'I take you to record that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.' It would almost seem as if he had in his mind those words of God to the prophet Ezekiel, 'O Son of Man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, 'O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.' (Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8.) If a minister endeavours, as God shall enable him, faithfully to warn his hearers as to the danger, deceitfulness, and destructiveness of sin; if he spreads before them the rich blessings of the Gospel, pardon, peace, hope, joy, comfort, rest; grace to sanctify the soul,—a precious blood that washes out crimson stains of sin,—a great and gracious Spirit to enlighten and guide,—and a glorious prospect of everlasting life to crown all; if he makes, as he is not only authorised but bidden to do, a free offer of all these blessings to any one who will only put

forth the hand of faith to grasp them; then, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, he has delivered his own soul. And if amongst those to whom such warnings are given, and such blessings offered, there are some who say, 'At a convenient season I will listen; I am not ready *yet* to turn to Christ; I do not want Him just *yet*; I have not done with the world and its sins and pleasures *yet*; I must take my chance for the future as thousands do;' what can be said of such, but that they are their own destroyers,—their blood is upon their own heads?

And when we look at the matter rightly we shall see that a blaspheming Jew is really far more consistent than a careless, worldly-minded, professing Christian. For the Jew openly denounces Jesus of Nazareth as an impostor, and refuses accordingly to believe in Him, and honour Him. The Christian, on the other hand, is quite ready to repeat creeds in which His eternal Godhead, and the great truths of His incarnation, death, and resurrection, are formally set forth,—quite ready to join in hymns of praise addressed, and in public prayers offered, to Him; and yet all the while gives up no sin for His sake; feels no real love to Him; shrinks from confessing Him; in short, in his *life*, if not with his *lips*, denies Him.

If we acknowledge Christ to be the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, let us not live as if He

had never died for us. The Jews who clamoured for our Lord's crucifixion exclaimed, 'His blood be on us and on our children.' It was in *their* mouths a horrible imprecation. But let *us* turn it into a humble prayer. May that precious blood of the Lamb of God be on us and on our children to cleanse us from all sins,—to purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God !

ACTS, xviii. 7-11.

7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house ; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace :

10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee : for I have much people in this city.

11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

St. PAUL, having met with determined opposition from the unbelieving and blaspheming Jews at Corinth, had declared his intention of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. He gave up, therefore, his reasonings in the synagogue, and held gatherings for instruction in the house of Justus adjoining it. Justus was plainly a Gentile proselyte who had become a Christian through God's blessing on St. Paul's preaching.

Another convert, too, of some importance joined

St. Paul and his company. This was Crispus, one of the chief rulers of the synagogue,—a leading member of that very body which had for the most part received St. Paul's message with opposition and contempt. Of this Crispus St. Paul speaks in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, as having been one of the few whom he had baptized with his own hand. And now a great and good work went on. *'Many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized.'* These are they of whom, five years after, the apostle wrote thus in his first Epistle to the Church at Corinth: 'I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. i. 4-7.)

Whilst St. Paul's heart was thus cheered by seeing his message received in faith by one after another, he was still further encouraged by a direct communication from the great Head of the Church Himself. *'Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city.'* It is very possible that the apostle, full as he was of holy zeal and love, and rejoicing heartily in the

good work going on, might yet have been at times troubled with fears and forebodings. He may have thought within himself, 'A wide door, indeed, and effectual, is opened unto me, but there are many adversaries. I am where Satan's seat is; idolatrous and licentious heathens, and blaspheming Jews, are around me; as yet the word of the Lord has free course, but how soon may my delivery of the Gospel message be stopped? how soon may I be silenced and shut up in prison, or even put to death, and all the good work going on be cut short?' If such thoughts as these disturbed the apostle's mind, they were soon scattered by the assurance of the Lord, that He was with him to protect him, and that He had much people in that city.

When we read that '*the Lord spake to Paul in the night by a vision,*' we are not to understand that St. Paul *dreamed* that he heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him. It is true that often in days of old (and occasionally, too, in our own day) God has spoken to men 'in a *dream*, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;' thus 'opening their ears and sealing their instruction.' (Job, xxiii. 15, 16.) But a *vision* is something more than a *dream*. Cornelius the Roman centurion is said to have *seen* 'in a *vision, evidently*' about the ninth hour of the day,—in the broad daylight, and when he was wide awake,—an angel of God coming in to him and addressing him by name. In St. Peter's

account of this he simply speaks of Cornelius having '*seen an angel*,' who told him what he should do.

We know what dreams are. When we are deep in sleep, and the eyes are closed, and the body lies helpless, in some strange way the mind is active and the thoughts wander off to things we have been mixed up with, and scenes and persons pass swiftly, and often very confusedly, before us. But all this takes place *only in our minds*. In *visions*, however, such as St. Paul, St. Peter, Cornelius, and many others saw, *real* sights were seen,—*real* voices were heard,—*real* objects passed before those who saw the vision. And the appearance is only called 'a vision,' because there was something about it quite out of the common way; and also perhaps because at the time the eyes, and ears, and minds of those who saw the vision were especially opened and enlightened to see things commonly unseen, as it was in the case of Elisha's servant at Dothan.

So, then, when we read that the Lord 'spake to Paul in the night by a vision,' let us be sure that the apostle did truly hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, cheering and encouraging him,—bidding him speak out boldly the Gospel of His grace, and assuring him that rich fruit should reward his toil. In sending His apostles forth to preach the Gospel, Christ had given the promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway; even unto the end of the world.' This general assurance given to all, the

Lord now specially repeats for his encouragement to St. Paul: 'I am with thee to protect and to prosper thee: I have much people in this city;—there are many here waiting to receive the truth; there are sheep here that must be gathered into my fold, and it is for thee to seek them out and to call them in.' Do we not see in all this the deep interest which the Lord Jesus Christ takes in the work of His messengers,—the exact knowledge which He has of that work,—the entire power which He possesses, and when it pleases Him, exercises, to restrain opponents,—the perfect clearness with which He sees the first movement of a heart towards Him? '*I have,*' said the Lord, '*much people in this city.*' Yet at that time they were hidden and unknown; many of them as yet serving idols, and far off from God; but the Lord who knoweth the hearts knew that there was soil where the good seed would strike root, and, therefore, He would have St. Paul go on diligently sowing in the assurance that he would not sow in vain.

St. Paul in one of his Epistles to Timothy writes thus, 'The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' (2 Tim. ii. 19.) There is the *hidden* knowledge possessed by Him to whom all hearts are open; and the *outward* mark of being the Lord's, in departing from iniquity; ceasing to do

evil, and learning to do well. To us is the Gospel preached as well as to the Corinthians, and it can surely be only through our own unbelief and carelessness, if those words quoted by St. Paul are not made good in our case, 'It shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the children of the living God.' (Rom. ix. 26.)

ACTS, xviii. 12-17.

12 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat.

13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you :

15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it : for I will be no judge of such matters.

16 And he drave them from the judgment-seat.

17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

For eighteen months St. Paul's work at Corinth went on prosperously. Then there broke forth again opposition from the unbelieving Jews. They took advantage of the appointment of a new Roman governor, Gallio by name, to raise an insurrection, and to drag St. Paul before his judgment-seat. '*This fellow,*' they said, '*persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.*' Gallio would not hear

from the apostle one word in explanation and defence ; he would not be troubled with the matter at all ; he would not inquire into it. And when the Greeks caught Sosthenes, a chief ruler of the synagogue, one of St. Paul's converts (afterwards spoken of by him in his First Epistle to the Corinthians as 'Sosthenes our brother'), and '*beat him before the judgment-seat,*' Gallio witnessed unmoved the gross violation of law and justice ; he '*cared for none of these things ;*' they were nothing to him. It was all the same to him whether St. Paul was right or wrong ; whether Sosthenes were beaten by the Hellenistic Jews in his very presence or not. The great questions for which the apostle was ready to *lose* his life, and the Jews to *take* it, were to him mere '*questions of words and names,*' and nothing more, which he declined to meddle with.

Gallio is said in ancient history to have been a man of sweet disposition and great uprightness. If so, this only makes the case worse for him ; for it shows that he treated Christians and Christianity with studied contempt ; and whilst he would manifest care and strictness in administering justice in mere earthly matters, he looked upon all questions connected with the faith of the Gospel as things beneath his notice, and the teachers of that faith as men whom it was not worth his while to help and protect.

In much the same kind of spirit, and in very

similar language to that used by Gallio, did the Roman governor Festus speak to Agrippa of St. Paul, some three years after: 'Against whom,' said he, 'when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusations of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of *their own superstition*, and of *one Jesus* which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.' '*Words*' and '*names*,'—'*their own superstition*,'—'*one Jesus*,'—in such careless, scornful, and contemptuous language did these men speak of high and holy mysteries, which if they did not fully understand, at least they were bound carefully to inquire into.

We have in our days many who imitate careless Gallio. 'We are no scholars,' they say, 'we cannot understand many things of which the Bible speaks: renewal by the Holy Spirit,—justification by faith,—sanctification; these, and such-like matters, are hard words and names, that we cannot be expected to enter into. Ministers and learned men may inquire about them, but *we* cannot; we must be content to know a little, and do the best we can.' Now such reasoning as this is very false, and very dangerous. The Bible speaks out very plainly; and ministers who wish to be 'found faithful' endeavour to do so too. And the way of life is plainly enough marked out to be discovered by all who seek and wish to tread it.

'*Words and names*;' men may speak in this way

scornfully of the great doctrines of the Gospel, but, after all, our everlasting portion depends upon the great things which such '*words*' represent. For, except our hearts are renewed by God the Holy Spirit,—except we find justification, that is, pardon, acquittal, peace with God, through faith in a Redeemer,—except as the fruit and evidence of true faith there be at least a striving to live a Christian life,—we shall find at last, to our bitter cost, that we have lost blessings which we slighted, and fallen into misery which we took no pains to escape.

It will be no excuse at last to say, 'I was no scholar.' We all *know* far better than we *do*. It is the *heart*, not the *head*, that is at fault. 'Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.' 'They know not, neither will they understand, but walk on still in darkness;' suffering the devil to raise a cloud of mist about their present position and future prospects, and meeting every warning with the excuse, 'I do not understand;' which soon passes on into, 'I do not care.' In mere earthly matters, 'Don't care!' has brought thousands to ruin; but unspeakably greater are the loss and shame to which it leads in matters that have to do with the soul and eternity. '*Gallio cared for none of these things.*' Let us beware lest we in any way follow him in his foolish and sinful indifference.

And, to make us more thoughtful, more earnest, let one '*word*' be often in our minds, the word

‘ETERNITY;’ and one ‘*name*,’ even the name which is above every name,—‘JESUS;’ let us often think why that Name is taken, and what it means; and what He who took it endured for our sakes. Thus, through God’s mercy and the teaching of His Spirit, we may be drawn from sinful and careless indifference to thankful love and hearty consecration of ourselves to the service of our God and Saviour.

ACTS, xviii. 18-26.

18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

22 And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

23 And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

24 And a certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

CORINTH, where there were so many and such bitter adversaries, could scarcely be a very safe and pleasant place for St. Paul to remain long in ; but the Lord had told him that 'He had much people there.' Paul, therefore, notwithstanding the ill-usage that he had met with, '*tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria,*' taking with him Priscilla and Aquila. It is said of Paul that he had '*shorn his head in Cenchrea : for he had a vow.*'

Cenchrea was the port of Corinth ; so that what is meant is this : on the point of leaving Greece, just before embarking, the apostle cut short his hair, which he had allowed to remain long for a time, in fulfilment of a vow which he had made as a Nazarite. We find the law relating to the vows of Nazarites fully laid down in the sixth chapter of Numbers. We have already seen in St. Paul's history how 'to the Jews he became a Jew ; to them that were under the law as himself under the law.' He did not act thus to make himself popular ; to gain the praise of men. He conformed to certain rites of the old Levitical law in order to disarm prejudice, and to gain from the Jews a hearing for the Gospel. He says himself, '*I am become all things to all men, if by any means I may save some.*' We must remember that St. Paul was a Jew, and, therefore, very differently circumstanced from ourselves. What he did in compliance with the Levi-

tical law was done not of *necessity*, but of *expediency*, and in order to win his fellow-countrymen.

Coming to Ephesus, St. Paul, as his manner was, entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. Then, resisting the entreaties of those who would have kept him longer amongst them, he bade them farewell ; giving as a reason for his departure that he must by all means keep the feast that was then approaching at Jerusalem. That feast was the feast of Pentecost ; and the same reasons which led St. Paul to take for a time the vow of a Nazarite upon himself, influenced him, no doubt, in his anxiety to be present at the observance of this great annual feast.

Whilst, however, he was compelled to leave his friends at Ephesus just then, the apostle promised to return to them if it was God's will that he should do so. He does not venture to make an *unconditional* promise of returning to Ephesus. The most he can say is, '*I will return again to you, if God will.*' The apostles were not at *all* times enabled to work miracles, or gifted with a prophetic knowledge of things to come. In his address to the elders of the Ephesian Church who met him at Miletus, St. Paul says, 'Behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there : save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.' He knew generally that trials lay in his path, but as

to the *kind* of trials, the *way* in which they should come, and the *time* when they should end, all this was hidden from him. St. James warns us that, 'not knowing what shall be on the morrow;' in all our plans and purposes we should say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live and do this and that.' (Jam. iv. 13, 14, 15.)

There is sometimes a cold, hasty, formal acknowledgment of God's overruling Providence made by us in arranging for the future; but how little do we realize, and act as if we did so, that 'in God's hand is our breath, and His are all our ways?' We should surely be more humble, more thankful, more careful, to redeem the time, if we deeply felt that God gives us to-day only, and says nothing about to-morrow, and that we cannot with safety make any plan for the future without adding, 'If God will.'

After leaving Ephesus St. Paul visited Cæsarea and Antioch; and, after a sojourn of some time there, he made a circuit through Galatia and Phrygia; in each place his work and object being to confirm and strengthen the disciples. We see some of the fruits of this missionary journey referred to in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, written some three or four years after this, in which the apostle speaks warmly of the way in which he and his message were received in Galatia.

St. Luke's story now brings before us another

helper in the good work which St. Paul had in hand,—Apollos by name. This man was a Jew, born at Alexandria, eloquent in speech, and very well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. He had been brought to some knowledge of Christ, and '*being fervent in spirit,*' earnest in his desire to make others know what he had learnt himself, he spake and taught diligently in the synagogue at Ephesus. Yet there was something wanting as yet about his faith and knowledge. He knew only the baptism of John the Baptist. Now John, as we may remember, continually spoke of himself as baptizing only 'with water unto repentance,' whilst He whose messenger he was should 'baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' Plainly Apollos did not yet know fully the power and grace of that Holy Spirit whom Christ promised to send from the Father. Aquila and Priscilla, being regular attendants at the worship of the synagogue, heard this man speak, and seeing that, notwithstanding his zeal, something was wanting in his knowledge, they took him to their home, and '*expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*'

Here we see what a Christian man and a Christian woman may do in a quiet way in instructing one who was a mighty and eloquent preacher of the Gospel of Christ. Apollos was not above taking a lesson from those of whom St. Paul speaks as being his 'helpers in Christ Jesus,'—Aquila and

Priscilla. If a woman may not preach, she may, as in this case, sometimes greatly help a preacher. We must remember, too, that Aquila and Priscilla had enjoyed special advantages in' the close intercourse which they had with St. Paul whilst all alike were busy tent-making. Having thus learnt much they were able and willing to impart of that which they had received to Apollos.

We shall have more to notice as to Apollos and his work. But let us not lose sight of the lesson taught us as to the value of kind and wise Christian intercourse. Many, in these days, hearing Apollos and observing his deficiencies, would have censured him perhaps, and left him to his imperfect knowledge. Love taught Aquila and Priscilla a different lesson. It would be a happy thing if they who 'fear the Lord,' instead of suspecting and condemning one another, 'spake often to one another,' and tried to lead one another on into a clearer, happier knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.

ACTS, xviii. 27, 28.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

WE have seen in what manner, and by what instrumentality, Apollos was brought to a clearer and fuller knowledge of Gospel truth. Wishing to go into Achaia, to carry on there his work of evangelization, he was furnished with letters of recommendation from the brethren at Ephesus to the disciples at Corinth. And when he had come amongst them, '*he helped them much which had believed through grace.*' He was the means of confirming in the faith those who already believed, and also of '*convincing the Jews*' by arguments drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures, '*that Jesus was Christ.*'

The teaching of Apollos was just of the same character as we have already seen to have been that of St. Peter, St. Stephen, St. Paul, and indeed all the first preachers of the Gospel; and indeed, we

may add, as that of the greatest Preacher the world ever saw,—Christ Himself. All went to Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, to prove from promises fulfilled—prophecies accomplished—types explained, ‘*that Jesus was the Christ,*’ so long foretold, so long expected, and in the fulness of time sent forth as man’s Redeemer. We must remember that Apollos is said to have been ‘*mighty in the Scriptures;*’ he was thoroughly well acquainted with them, they were his study and delight. It is not, then, to be wondered at, that with convincing power he was able to prove from them that Jesus was Christ.

Amongst ourselves there are few, if any, to be found, who are not most ready to profess their faith in Christ, and to acknowledge Him as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Unbelief does not in these days often take the form of open denial and rejection of Christ. It is far more common for men to acknowledge Christ as a Saviour, and yet never come to Him for salvation; to hear His words and yet not obey them; to speak of Him, read of Him, sing of Him, as the only way to heaven, and yet not to stir one step to walk in that way. And in all this there is something very sad, and very dangerous. For religion, if it is to be anything at all, is a personal business between the soul of each of us and God. And it is a wretched thing to walk, as it were, *around* the cross of Christ, and never fall down in penitence at the foot of it; to look admiringly at

the glory of heaven, and yet sink down at last in shame and darkness.

Apollos is said to have '*helped them much which believed through grace.*' The words remind us that faith itself owes its origin to the movement of God's grace upon our hearts. There is no kind of merit in faith. 'All holy desires, and all good counsels,' as well as 'all just works,' proceed from God. As St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Ephesians, 'By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.' (Eph. ii. 8.) It is God that first worketh in us, or we should either not work at all, or work wrongly and in vain. But God *does* mercifully work in us, and because He does, we are to work too, and whilst working to believe and hope.

Paul might plant, and Apollos water, but God alone could give the increase. Let us make it our constant prayer to the great Author of our faith that He would 'increase our faith.' And when we see that to be '*mighty in the Scriptures*' is the best step that we can take towards being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and being helpful to others, let us never neglect God's holy Word, or count the reading of it a weary task. No gifts of natural eloquence would have made Apollos what he was. Many a humble Christian, well read in his Bible, and seeking continually heavenly light and teaching in prayer, proves more than a match for learned

cavillers. And if we only diligently follow on to know the Lord in the use of appointed means, God will provide help for us in one way or another; perhaps by Christian friends, as in the case of Apollos, perhaps by religious books placed in our way, as well as by the ordinances of the sanctuary; and thus our hearts will be stablished in faith, and our lives be bright and useful.

ACTS, xix. 1-7.

1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus : and finding certain disciples,

2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized ? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them ; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

7 And all the men were about twelve.

WHILST Apollos was busy preaching the Gospel at Corinth, St. Paul, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, was employed in a missionary journey throughout Galatia and Phrygia. This being successfully accomplished, the apostle came to Ephesus, and found there some disciples who were much in

the same position as Apollos had been, before he was instructed in the way of the Lord by Aquila and Priscilla. They, like him, 'knew only the baptism of John.' These St. Paul asked, '*Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?*' Plainly the Apostle referred more particularly to that special out-pouring of the Spirit, more or less accompanied in those days with outward miraculous signs, which was spoken of by prophets of old, and directly promised by Christ, and which was begun to be given on the day of Pentecost. '*They said,*' in reply to St. Paul's question, '*We have not so much as heard if there be any Holy Ghost.*' The words as they stand sound strange to us. How could these be 'disciples' at all, and yet not know even of the existence of the Holy Spirit? In the Old Testament Scriptures the Holy Spirit was often spoken of. The Spirit of God is said to have moved on the waters in the work of creation. David in his Psalms prayed, 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' The Prophets of old often predicted in different terms an outpouring of the Spirit. It is impossible that these disciples meant to say that they did not know, and had never heard, whether there was such a Person as the Holy Ghost.

A passage in the seventh chapter of St. John's Gospel will throw much light on the matter. There, after a gracious promise made by Christ of satisfying

the thirst of any that should come to Him, the Evangelist adds, 'But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe in Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.' Or as the words are, 'the Holy Ghost was not yet.' The word, 'given,' is not in the original. The Holy Ghost was not yet fully manifested; not yet poured out abundantly upon the Church; for Jesus was not yet ascended up on high, and glorified. '*Given*,' we know He had been, long before this to many a prophet and righteous man; but still given in a limited measure. And so with regard to these Christians at Ephesus. They use language precisely similar to that used by St. John. It should not be, 'We have not so much as heard if there is any Holy Ghost,' but rather, 'We have not so much as heard if the Holy Ghost is;' *i. e.*, is yet poured out,—yet to be had, if that which was foreshown and promised has begun to be fulfilled.

St. Paul in evident surprise asked, '*Unto what then were ye baptized?*' clearly implying that if rightly baptized 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' they could not possibly be ignorant of the Spirit's power and work. It turned out that they had not been so baptized. They had been amongst the multitude who crowded to John's baptism. That was a '*baptism of repent-*

ance,' only intended as a preparation for the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which He whose messenger John was should introduce. John always pointed to Christ, always spoke of Him as vastly greater than himself, as 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' 'I indeed,' he said, 'baptize you with the baptism of water unto repentance, but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.'

When those disciples at Ephesus heard St. Paul's explanation of the difference between the baptism of John and Christian baptism as administered afterwards, they were gladly '*baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*' We are not told that St. Paul baptized them. Most probably he did not, for, as he says (as a general rule, with some few exceptions), Christ sent him 'not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.' As St. Peter, after instructing Cornelius and his friends in gospel truth, 'commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord,' so now, it is likely St. Paul employed others in baptizing those Ephesian disciples. Then, when baptized, the Apostle '*laid his hands upon them, and the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied.*'

Here, as in the eighth chapter, we seem to find a warrant for the laying on of hands upon baptized persons in confirmation, expressly said to be done

‘after the example of the holy apostles.’ We do not look now for signs and wonders to accompany, and to give evidence of, the Spirit’s work. And yet that work will have a witness in the life, not less sure, though less marked by miracle. St. Paul tells us very plainly what the fruits of the Spirit are, even ‘joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ He tells us also as plainly that, ‘if we are led by the Spirit of God we are the sons of God,’ and that, ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.’

Of none amongst us could it possibly be said that we ‘have not heard of the Holy Ghost.’ The name of that great and gracious Spirit is often on our tongues in creeds, prayers, and hymns. But it is not at all a needless and unsuitable question for us, ‘Have ye received the Holy Ghost?—are you in any measure led, taught, and sanctified by Him?’ Not, ‘does He strive with you? has He moved on the face of your hearts as He moved upon the waters in creation?’ This He has most unquestionably done. But, ‘have you yielded yourselves to His guidance? Have you wished and prayed that He would make you more like Christ?’ When next we utter words which express a wish that the Holy Spirit would work upon us, and dwell within us, let us think within ourselves that we hear the voice of Christ asking of us, as He asked of one who sought His help

when on earth, 'What would ye that I should do unto you?' And let it be with devout and earnest sincerity that from our hearts and lips the cry arises, 'Lord, that Thou wouldst pour out abundantly Thy Spirit upon us, and grant us evermore His quickening, sanctifying, and comforting grace.'

ACTS, xix. 8-12.

8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:

12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

AFTER instructing some disciples at Ephesus as to the work and power of the Holy Ghost, and laying his hands upon them, St. Paul went into the synagogue of the Jews, and for three months argued, exhorted, and persuaded his hearers, in '*the things concerning the kingdom of God.*' This he did with all earnestness and boldness; again and

again renewing his entreaties, that those who heard him would accept Jesus of Nazareth as the great Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets did write, and would receive thankfully and believingly those unspeakable blessings of remission of sins, and peace with God, offered in and through Him.

Here however, as often elsewhere, the apostle's convincing arguments and earnest exhortations met with a very cold reception. Some were hardened and believed not; some went further, and broke out into slanderous accusations before the multitude, speaking evil of the religion of Christ and its followers. Upon this St. Paul acted once again in the same way in which we saw him (in the thirteenth chapter) acting at Antioch. He left the hardened opposers to themselves, and, taking with him a little body of disciples really anxious for instruction, taught them daily in a private school of grammar or philosophy. This continued for two years; and as during that time there was a continual flow of people in and out of Ephesus, from the districts of Ionia and Lydia (which are here meant by the word 'Asia'), the glad tidings of the Gospel were widely spread; *'both Jews and Greeks heard the word of the Lord Jesus.'*

During the time that St. Paul was preaching the Gospel at Ephesus it pleased God to confirm his testimony by some very remarkable miracles. 'God,' we read, *'wrought special miracles by the hands of*

Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.' To enter better into what is told us in these verses and those closely following, we must bear in mind that Ephesus was at that time peculiarly subject to the influence of Satan, exercised upon the people by means of magical arts, witchcraft, and sorcery, practised by Jews and Gentiles. No doubt there was in all these a great mixture of deceit and trickery. But this was not all. There was also, as we may see plainly in this chapter, the direct working of the devil himself. We know that the magicians of Egypt, by their enchantments, imitated to a certain extent the wonders wrought by Moses. It matters little to Satan how he carries out his evil and cruel purposes—whether by the tricks and lies of designing men, or by signs and lying wonders wrought by his help. And when men enter upon a course of deception they become themselves more and more deceived.

If, then, we keep this in mind, that besides those who lived in the darkest idolatry, there were also in Ephesus many who 'used curious arts,' who not only *pretended* to have, but *had*, dealings with unseen spirits, and claimed to be able to exercise supernatural power, we shall understand better the special powers bestowed upon the apostle Paul, and the peculiar suitableness of the wonders which he

was enabled to work at Ephesus. God commonly teaches men by the very means which will come most home to them. Our Lord convinced Galilean fishermen of His Divine power by miraculous draughts of fishes, by storms calmed, by water turned into a crystal pavement beneath His sacred feet. The wise men of the East, accustomed to survey the heavens, were led to Bethlehem by a star. And, in the case before us, the idolatrous and superstitious Ephesians were led by special signs and wonders wrought through the power of God, to see that God was far stronger than the devil, and that all their tricks and charms were childish folly and blasphemous delusions, such as the light of the Gospel could put to shame and the preachers of the Gospel had power to master.

'Special miracles.' Perhaps the peculiarity of the miracles wrought lay chiefly in this, that it was not needful for St. Paul to see, to speak to, to put his hands upon the sick and suffering, the paralytic, and the possessed. It was sufficient that handkerchiefs and aprons which had touched his body should be taken to those afflicted, and cures were immediately wrought, and evil spirits cast out. All this was done in the name and by the power of the Lord Jesus whom Paul preached.

We can easily conceive how, amongst such people as the Ephesians, it must have awakened astonishment, and led many to listen attentively to

St. Paul's teaching, when they saw a cloth brought from his person made the means of healing in an instant some long-standing disease, or casting out some unclean spirit. There is, however, nothing whatever in all this to encourage the vain superstitions of the Church of Rome in the adoration which she teaches her people to pay to relics of holy persons and things. Even if we could be quite sure that what is said to be a fragment of the cross, or a shred of a garment worn by our Lord or the blessed Virgin, or a bone of some martyr, were just what each is described to be, still there is nothing in the whole Bible to make us think that such things can do any one good. The handkerchiefs through which miracles of healing were wrought in St. Paul's case were brought from him whilst he was alive; we are not told that anything left by St. Paul and worn by him did any good after his death. The miracles wrought were intended to serve as the apostle's credentials, to lead men to listen carefully to the Gospel which he preached; but they give not the least countenance to relic-worship.

We read, indeed, of one remarkable relic in the Bible, and are told what became of it; that is, the brazen serpent which Moses set up at God's bidding in the wilderness during the plague of fiery serpents sent to punish Israel. If ever there was a thing which we might have thought it was lawful to

worship and hold sacred, it was this. Yet this very thing became a stumbling-block to Israel, and was destroyed by Hezekiah, seven hundred years after it was first made, as a useless and mischievous 'piece of brass.' It had served its purpose, done its work, and, though made by God's command, must not interfere with worship to be paid to Him alone.

Let us not forget, when we read of those wondrous miracles which God wrought by the hands of St. Paul, that, being written down in God's book of truth, they are to us as real and true as if we had seen them performed. Keeping this in mind, let us turn to the sayings of this same great preacher and worker of miracles, written to these very Ephesians about eight years after this. If we had had a sick brother or friend cured by a garment brought from St. Paul's person, with what respect and interest should we have listened to him ! But if it had been so, all would have been no more true for our seeing the wonders wrought. Remembering, then, how God confirmed His servant's words, let us read his exhortations, warnings, instructions, with a teachable mind, and pray for ourselves as he prayed for the Ephesians, 'that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith ; and that, being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.' (Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19.)

ACTS, xix. 13-16.

13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

WE have seen that Ephesus was not only full of idolatry, but also of those who practised curious arts of sorcery, witchcraft, astrology, and divination. Conspicuous amongst such were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, that is, the head of one of the twenty-four courses of priests. These men travelled about amongst the cities of Asia, making a trade of their pretended sorcery; pretending perhaps that there was some mysterious virtue in their number—seven—professing to be able to

cast out evil spirits. It gives us some idea of the corrupt state of religion amongst the Jews at the time, that these seven exorcists should be the sons of a leading priest. For long ago, under the law of Moses, it was ordered that witches, and wizards, and those who dealt with familiar spirits, should be put to death. Yet here in the family of a priest, who of all others should have been most scrupulous about observance of the law, were found those who made a trade of sorcery, and sought to cast out devils by the prince of the devils. These men saw with astonishment the wonderful works wrought by the Apostle Paul, and to their wicked, covetous minds it seemed as if a good opportunity was presented of making money and showing their power.

In no way whatever believing in Christ, having no part or lot with His followers, they yet dared to use the name of Jesus as a charm—to make trial of its power; dared to deal with it as a conjurer with his wand, as a sorcerer with his muttered words of power. ‘*We adjure you,*’ they cried over the evil spirits by which some unhappy creatures were possessed and harassed, ‘*by Jesus whom Paul preacheth;*’ not by Jesus whom *we* believe in and honour; *we* know Him not; He is nothing to *us*; *we* care nothing about Him; but His name seems to be in some way a word of power; come, then, let us test it; let us see if it has any virtue; in that name we bid you to come out.

What was the result of this profane and blasphemous use of that which is above everything else holy and honourable? ‘*The evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?*’ When our Lord cast out an unclean spirit from a man in the synagogue of Capernaum, the spirit cried out, ‘Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth, art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.’ There was the constrained acknowledgment of truth which was terrible and hateful to those who uttered it. The evil spirit at Ephesus acknowledged without hesitation the power of the Lord Jesus, and of St. Paul as His accredited messenger; but set at nought the authority of those who used a name which they did not reverence, and invoked a power which they blasphemed.

So, then, endued with supernatural strength by the foul spirit within, the man possessed sprang upon these pretenders, and, though there were seven against one, he mastered them, tore off their outer garments, and, inflicting upon them serious wounds, drove them out of the house in disgrace and terror.

Now one thing that strikes us at once in this story is the power of the name of Jesus. Even when uttered by an unbelieving Jew it wrung from an evil spirit a confession of the truth. It proved a

name of power, though in this case the power was mixed up with what was very fearful.

The story should surely caution us against an unholy use of holy names and things. It is playing with edged tools to name the holy name of 'Jesus,' to profess faith in Him, to speak and sing of Him, whilst all the time there lurks in the heart an utter dislike of His service, and the *life*, if not the *mouth*, denies Him. And it is a worse case even than that of the sons of Sceva worsted and wounded by that demoniac at Ephesus, when one who has long used the name of Jesus lightly and unfeelingly is left by the Spirit of God to himself; and the word becomes to him a savour of death unto death, and creeds are repeated without faith, and hymns sung without feeling, and prayers offered to which no answer is desired or expected.

'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?' It was as much as to say, 'To the authority of Jesus, and Paul, His servant and messenger, I would have submitted, however reluctantly; *their* bidding I *could* not have disobeyed; *their* power I own; *yours* I altogether *disown* and *defy*.'

It is something very like imitating those exorcists of Ephesus for men to dream of bettering the world by anything short of the faith of Christ and the Gospel of Christ. Evil spirits of lust and cruelty, malice and falsehood, are not to be cast out

by mere human power. We may see in the history of ancient times how little mere human wisdom, arts and sciences, philosophy and civilisation, could do, when they did their very best, towards checking sin. The spirit that dwells and works in the children of disobedience, whether it drives its poor victims to drunkenness, malice, uncleanness, or lying; or only to that respectable ungodliness which tries to do wholly without God in the world, might well rebuke all the attempts of those who try to teach morality apart from Christ, with the words, '*Jesus I know, and Paul I know*; I own the power of Christ to restrain and remove me; but who are ye? *Where and what* is your power to subdue sin, and to teach purity of heart and life?' The fact is, nothing short of real religion can set men free from the bondage of besetting sins. No man stands safe who tries to stand supported only by his own resolutions, half-way between God and Mammon. Only true faith in Christ crucified, only love to Him, only His grace and power, can make us and keep us safe and happy.

What is the name of 'Jesus' to us? We see it is a name of power and terror in hell. Is it to us a name of infinite sweetness?—'like ointment poured forth?' It *ought* to be so. God grant that it *may* be so more and more. It is not enough to bend the head when that holy name is spoken. The head

118 *The Name above every Name.*

may be bowed, and the heart may still be stiff and cold. May the work for which Jesus took the name which He bears be accomplished in saving us from our sins ; and may it be our happy portion to praise the Name which is above all names throughout eternity.

ACTS, xix. 17-20.

17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds.

19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

It is exceedingly likely that the sons of Sceva were men very well known at Ephesus. Seven men going about together—men, too, by no means of low birth and station—claiming to have dealings with the unseen world, and power over unseen spirits, might naturally be regarded with something of respect and fear. The sight, therefore, of those seven exorcists flying in utter terror out of a house, with torn garments and wounded bodies, chased by one enraged demoniac, was likely to make a great stir and a great talk. *'This was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on*

them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.' So here, as a thousand times before and since, the devil was taken in his own craftiness. The wicked presumption of his servants turned out greatly for the furtherance of the Gospel; and Ephesus (filled as it was with idolatry, sorcery, witchcraft, and every form of Satanic trickery and deceit) became from end to end of the city conscious of a superior power in the midst of it; and so '*mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.*'

Amongst those who embraced the truths of the Gospel there was a considerable number who had 'used curious arts,' had dealt in magic, astrology, and divination; using for the purpose books of a costly nature, filled with richly-illuminated signs, and symbols, and cabalistic figures: 'Ephesian letters,' as they were often called. These persons, when convinced of the sin and folly of such practices, came forward, and '*confessed and showed their deeds;*' and brought the books which had been the implements of their unhallowed craft, and burned them in the most public manner. Nor was the sacrifice thus made one of a trifling nature, for the estimated value of the books thus destroyed was fifty thousand pieces of silver—little less than two thousand pounds of our money.

There is much in the conduct of these Ephesian converts which furnishes us with a very instructive example. They made a full disclosure (though it

were to their own shame) of the system of imposture which they had carried on,—of the aid which they had sought and obtained from the powers of darkness. It goes far towards showing a man converted to God when he openly acknowledges, ‘I have gone far astray ; I have followed lying vanities, and have thus forsaken my own mercies ; I am a miserable prodigal who have forsaken my Father’s home, and have sought in vain to fill myself with the husks that the swine do eat—the lusts of the flesh and the enticements of the world.’ It is sad to feel all this, and humbling to confess it ; to do so, however, is one of the safest signs of a changed heart, and a changed life. ‘Whoso hideth his sins shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy.’

But there was another, and that, too, a most important, step taken in the right direction by those Ephesians. They brought their costly books, and ‘*burned them before all men.*’ In acting thus they secured that neither themselves nor any others should in future be misled and corrupted by them. They put themselves effectually out of the way of temptation. We must remember that there was no printing in those days ; the books, then, would in all likelihood be finally destroyed. They were not at all likely, as might be the case in these days, to be reproduced.

We can easily conceive when the books were

brought out into some public square or market-place, and the faggots piled up which should consume them, some might have said, 'To what purpose is this waste? If you do not mean to use the books again, still why not keep them as costly curiosities, as relics of the past? They can do no harm whilst on the shelf or in the cupboard.' The Ephesian Christians were, however, too wise to reason and act thus. If the books were kept, in some weak moment, when the warmth of their new faith was cooled a little, they might be tempted to take them down and look at them, and thus old feelings might be revived; or if they were not themselves injured by the books, others into whose hands those wicked treatises might fall might be misled and ruined. So in holy indignation they determined to stamp out the mischief at once and for ever. Nor was it in a spirit of regret that they counted the cost of what was destroyed; rather it was with the feelings of those who had learnt to estimate what they lately prized as dung and dross, pestilence and poison, compared with the Gospel of Christ.

In all this a most useful lesson is taught us. When a man's conscience is startled, and he comes to the conclusion that it would be far safer and happier for him to begin to live a truly Christian life, he must of course expect to meet with temptation; it is, however, of the utmost importance that he should not *put* or *keep* temptation in his own way. There

are multitudes of bad books in these days, scattering seeds of poison over our land. And even when a man has come to feel that a book is vile and dangerous, or a song suggestive of evil thoughts, or a picture liable to stir up sinful desires, still there is a kind of dangerous curiosity, a clinging to that which has once been delighted in, which are apt to make him keep by him the dangerous thing, even if he does not often take it out and pore over it. But this is dangerous and wrong. The bad book should be burnt; not kept in a cupboard, even under the strongest of locks and keys, but burnt (as were those books at Ephesus), that it may no more harm its owner nor others. The vile song should never more pass the *lips*, or if possible enter into the *ears*, of him who is now at last (in profession at least) a candidate for heaven. The filthy picture should not for a moment be looked at, but torn into a thousand fragments.

There is such a thing as tempting the tempter, — putting ourselves outside of the protection of God's Spirit,—setting ourselves in the very drift and current of worldliness, vanity, and sin; and then excusing a fall on the ground of the weakness of our nature and the force of temptation. This is like the poor foolish moth which flutters round a candle, though often scorched, until it dies. We must come out wholly from what is perilous to us, and not 'touch the unclean thing,' let that be what

it may. We must take good heed that we are not found *assisting* instead of *resisting* the temptations of our great enemy.

It is very remarkable that, as if in recompense for the sacrifice of *bad* books, Ephesus became afterwards peculiarly rich in *good* books. It received an Epistle from St. Paul, and a Gospel and the Book of Revelation from St. John. It had also an Epistle from one of the early fathers, a faithful martyr for Christ, St. Ignatius. So for *bad* books destroyed, that Church received books able to make men wise unto salvation. We cannot give up anything for God, but He is able to give us an abundant recompense. Is a bad book burnt? God can show us in His Holy Book a power and sweetness that we never expected to find there. Is a bad companion forsaken? From amongst the excellent of the earth God will provide us friends. Are dangerous amusements relinquished? God will teach the poor heart, distracted with earthly cares and vanities, sins and follies, to find real peace and satisfaction in His happy service.

ACTS, xix. 21-41.

21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.

23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;

25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and hav-

ing caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another : for the assembly was confused ; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

35 And when the town-clerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter ?

36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies : let them implead one another.

39 But if ye inquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

WE have seen how, in spite of all opposition—indeed, we might rather say *in consequence* of opposition triumphantly overcome—the Word of God mightily grew and prevailed at Ephesus. After these things St. Paul purposed to make a second visitation of the Churches of Macedonia and Achaia; thence to go to Jerusalem, and after that to Rome. Having formed this plan, he sent before him two of his companions, Timotheus and Erastus. They appear to have been sent forward to make a collection in Achaia and Macedonia for the poor saints in Jerusalem. In St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, written about this time, he says, 'I must tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost; for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.'

It was at this time, whilst the apostle was waiting and working alone at Ephesus, that a great disturbance arose with a view to prevent the further spread of the truth. There was at Ephesus a magnificent temple of the goddess Diana. This temple was reckoned one of the wonders of the world. It had one hundred and twenty-seven lofty columns, each one the gift of a king; was about four hundred and fifty feet long, and about two hundred and fifty broad. The goddess of this great temple was a rude image, like some hideous Indian idol; and was pretended to have fallen down from the sky. Small models of the temple and its goddess were made in

silver, and sold in order to be used as charms when set up in houses or carried about upon a journey. It was a flourishing trade at Ephesus to manufacture and sell these models, or 'silver shrines,' as they are called.

Demetrius, a leading silversmith of the city, employing a large number of workmen in this business, noticed with anxiety the influence which the Apostle Paul was gaining ; and, fearing for his craft, he gathered together his artisans and others employed in the same way and made an address to them. The first thing which strikes us in what Demetrius said, is his plain acknowledgment of the great work done by St. Paul : *'Ye see and hear that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands.'* It must have been most galling to Demetrius and his companions to see a man like St. Paul drawing away so many from their old idolatrous worship—their long-cherished superstitions. But there the fact was, plain to every one ; and it was useless to attempt to deny it. In like manner, in these days, even those who dislike the Gospel and its friends are forced to allow that there is a power in it which they wonder at, but cannot question. The work is seen to be of God—the power to be manifestly more than human.

Another thing comes out strongly in the address of Demetrius ; it is this, *self-interest* was at the

bottom of all his zeal against St. Paul's preaching. He professed, indeed, to be very jealous for the honour of Diana and her temple, but that which was uppermost in his mind was that the craft by which he and others were enriched might be endangered. If all this great work of conversion to God went on no more silver shrines would be wanted ; the hope of their gains would be gone ; hence then, the anger expressed and the disturbance raised.

There are those in our days who, like Demetrius, thrive by other men's sins. Those who encourage intemperance in others for gain, those who with the same object provide sinful or dangerous pleasures, those who write and print bad books, those who by some vile and evil craft get their wealth, —all these imitate the covetous and wicked silver-smith of Ephesus. Greedy of gain, they care not if the way to reach it leads them over souls trampled down in the deepest mire of sin. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul,' or destroy the souls of others? What satisfaction can there be in handling money stained, as it were, with a brother's blood? Let us take good heed lest motives of self-interest lead us at any time, or in any way, to put a stumbling-block in the way of others ; let us watch lest love of earthly gain makes us risk the welfare of our own souls.

The arguments of Demetrius told at once upon his hearers. Nothing touches men so quickly as

that which has to do with their own gain. From one to another word was carried that affront had been given to their famous goddess and her splendid temple; and, like fire in a forest, the disturbance spread until the whole city was full of confusion, and from a thousand tongues the cry arose, '*Great is Diana of the Ephesians.*' Two of St. Paul's friends and companions were seized by the angry mob; and he, with his usual courage, being about to enter into the thick of the crowd, was only kept back by some of the presidents of the public games who were friendly to him from doing what would most probably have cost him his life. An attempt made by a Jew, named Alexander, to explain matters only increased the confusion. Some cried one thing, some another; many knew not what was the cause of the uproar which yet they joined in; until at last all the many voices joined in one cry, and for two hours nothing was heard but the excited shout, '*Great is Diana of the Ephesians.*'

With great difficulty the town-clerk (or 'recorder,' as the word seems to mean) of the city quieted the angry mob. He spoke of the honour paid by all the city to their goddess; recommended a quiet recourse to the remedy which the law provided; and pointed out the danger there was of the Roman authorities interfering to punish the ringleaders of such a tumult.

Does not the zeal of those poor dark heathens,

their indignation at the dishonour put upon their favourite idol, and their loud outcries in her honour, —do not all these put to shame the cold indifference of Christians who often listen coldly whilst the name of Christ is blasphemed, and the faith of Christ is scoffed at? Surely idolaters ought not to have more regard for the honour of their idols than Christians have for the honour of Him to whom they owe every hope and every blessing. Let the words of the prophet express our solemn resolution, ‘All people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.’ (Micah, iv. 5.)

ACTS, xx. 1-7.

1 And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia,

2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,

3 And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.

4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus, and Trophimus.

5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.

6 And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

AFTER the disturbance and opposition raised in Ephesus by Demetrius and his party, St. Paul felt called to go and preach the Gospel elsewhere. So, having called together the disciples, and taken an

affectionate leave of them, he set out for Macedonia. There he went about preaching, extending his journey, as we learn from his Epistle to the Romans, probably as far as Illyricum. Thence he went to southern Greece, and abode there three months. There, whilst sojourning in the house of Gaius at Corinth, St. Paul seems to have written his famous Epistle to the Romans.

Purposing to sail as before from the port of Corinth direct to Syria, the apostle's plans were changed on account of a plot against his life by the Jews, partly from malice, and partly perhaps on account of the collection of money which he was carrying with him. This plot seemed to make it more prudent for St. Paul to turn back once again to Macedonia.

At Philippi St. Luke rejoined him, and they sailed away from thence after the days of unleavened bread. Seven of St. Paul's friends preceded St. Luke and himself to Troas; intending to go forward with him into Asia.

At Troas the whole party rested a week, and we have an account given us of what happened on a Sunday during the time spent there. *'Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow.'* This is one of the passages which clearly show us that after our Lord's resurrection the one holy day in seven,—the day of rest

and worship,—was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first, from Saturday to Sunday. It received, too, a new name, ‘the Lord’s day.’ It is spoken of quite as a usual thing that Christians should meet together on the first day of the week for prayer, praise, and holy communion. ‘*On the first day of the week WHEN the disciples came together;*’—there was no question as to whether they should come together or no. It was to them quite the usual and natural thing; it was God’s day, and they reckoned it as much their delight as it was their duty to meet together for holy worship, and the breaking of bread. Does it not show a sad want of love, and weakness of faith, when trifles keep us from God’s house, and the table of the Lord is from time to time forsaken?

In this company then, of disciples gathered together on the Lord’s day at Troas, St. Paul preached the Gospel with more than common fervour, knowing that on the morrow he must leave them, and that many, most indeed, of those present heard him for the last time. His heart was full, and out of the abundance of it his mouth poured forth words of love, and truth, and wisdom. He was ‘*long preaching;*’ he ‘*continued his speech until midnight.*’ Probably therefore, the apostle was two hours or more preaching. People who, in these days, complain about long sermons, would have wondered to see those Christians at Troas listening

hour after hour with unabated interest to the pleadings of Christ's messenger. No doubt there was a vast difference between the preaching of St. Paul and that of any minister of these days; but after all, the subjects about which he preached are the same as are brought before us continually; and that which made the Christians of Troas listen so attentively to the apostle's lengthened discourse was, that they were themselves so thoroughly in earnest. They did not come together, as so many amongst us do, from mere form or custom,—neither expecting nor desiring to be in any way altered by what they heard. They sought help, comfort, and instruction; so the time spent in listening did not seem long, nor the prolonged sermon wearisome.

We shall consider, when we read the next verses, the strange interruption caused in the night's services by the death and restoration to life of Eutychus. This must indeed have given great additional weight and solemnity to St. Paul's discourse. With minds awed and solemnized by such a merciful interposition of God's providence, and filled with thankfulness, the disciples all joined in the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

It can hardly be wrong to draw from the administration of that holy rite at such a time, the conclusion, that it is perfectly lawful to celebrate and receive the Holy Communion in the evening. For even if it so happened that, from the unwonted

length of St. Paul's sermon and other circumstances, the hour of midnight was past before the disciples joined in the breaking of bread, and it was very early in the morning, still they had come together in the evening for the purpose, and it was clearly an unexpected thing that the service should be so lengthened out. It was evening when our Lord instituted His holy supper. If, as a rule, the morning seems the fittest time, as an exception surely, and to meet the need of those who cannot attend at other times, the evening is perfectly lawful.

St. Paul, after the celebration of the holy communion, having taken some refreshment, continued his conversation even till the dawning of the day. He had a walk of twenty miles before him the next morning from Troas to Assos, but nothing seemed to daunt the courage of this faithful soldier of the cross. If we had but more of the warmth, and love, which animated preacher and hearers on that Sunday evening in the upper room at Troas, how happy and profitable would services prove to us, and how manifest would be our growth in grace and knowledge!

ACTS, xx. 8-12.

8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.

9 And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep : and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves ; for his life is in him.

11 When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.

12 And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

AMONGST St. Paul's hearers at Troas was a young man named Eutychus, who was seated in the open window for more air and coolness,—or rather in the outside balcony usual in the houses of those days. The room was hot and crowded ; there were many lights increasing the heat. Overcome by exhaustion, heat, and weariness, Eutychus sank into a deep sleep, and, losing his balance, fell down heavily on the pavement below, and was taken up dead.

Confusion and terror ensued, and loud lamentations were made. St. Paul however, breaking off his discourse, went down and fell upon the body, as Elisha did on the son of the Shunammite, and, embracing him, said, 'Trouble not yourself, for his life is in him.' We are not to think from these words that Eutychus was not actually dead. It is distinctly said that '*he was taken up dead.*' The words of the apostle plainly mean the same as those which our Lord used about the daughter of Jairus, 'The maid is not dead, but sleepeth.' She, like Eutychus, was unquestionably dead; but in each case life was about to be restored. It would seem as if Eutychus were taken aside,—probably laid down to rest awhile, to recover from the shock sustained; and after the night spent in preaching, and celebration of the Holy Communion, and then a simple repast,—after all this, '*They brought the young man alive,*' probably to take a last farewell of his kind teacher and benefactor, '*and were not a little comforted.*'

At first sight the story of Eutychus may seem to us very like a judgment on careless and inattentive sleepers in the assemblies of God's people. But his case is very different from that of many amongst us. His presence in that gathering of disciples looks as if he were sincere and in earnest. For those were not days in which from form, or custom, or gain, any one would be likely to mix

himself up closely with Christians and join their assemblies. It is scarcely possible to conceive of any but the highest motives having brought Eutychus into that upper room the night before St. Paul left Troas. Then again, the deep distress shown by the Christians at his death, and their joy and comfort on his recovery, make us think he was loved and respected. Nor is there one word dropped by St. Paul of reproof and blame. It was simply a case of human infirmity. The room was close and hot, the sermon was very long, and attentive listening for some time produces drowsiness. The young man too, may have been far from strong. Certainly he had done nothing to encourage sleep. He had not placed himself in such a position as to make it almost impossible to avoid it; if he had, he would not have fallen down when he slept. Probably he was in a very far from comfortable position. In this respect he acted very differently from some amongst ourselves. For there are those who, thoughtless and irreverent, and without a wish to turn their attendance in God's house to good account, loll about in their seats, and place themselves in such positions that, almost as a matter of course, sleep overtakes them. They do not stir themselves up to seek God. That which is *infirmity* in *some*, and under *some circumstances*, may be *sin* in *others*, and under other circumstances. It is a precious privilege to have the Gospel preached to

us ; to listen drowsily and carelessly is to slight God's mercy and grieve His Spirit.

If we must not regard the death of Eutychus as a judgment, certainly on the other hand we may see in his restoration a proof of God's merciful consideration of our infirmities. 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.' 'He desireth mercy and not sacrifice.' Of course we are to watch lest the body gain the mastery, and fight against such hindrances as it puts in the way of acts of devotion. But at the same time let us be quite sure that our Father knoweth that we need rest and sleep, food and raiment ; and that our great High Priest is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and can make tender allowance for aching heads, and weary limbs, which often damp the ardour of a willing heart. When His disciples slept in the garden of Gethsemane, He said on their behalf, 'The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.' He slept Himself, even amidst a storm which tried the faith of His disciples, in a ship on the Sea of Galilee.

Only, if we do not actually go to sleep whilst the Gospel is being preached to us, let us take good care that we do not fall into or continue in a state of slumber as regards our souls. If Eutychus had remained dead that night at Troas, we might still have hoped well of him. For, as we have seen, there was everything to make us think him a sin-

cere disciple. But what must we say of those who take no delight in seeking God,—who forsake the Lord's table, and go slumbering on year after year without one breath of real prayer, one hearty push towards heaven? Surely to such sudden death would be very far indeed from being sudden glory. May the voice of our most merciful Redeemer reach effectually all our hearts, 'Awake, ye that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.' May a view of the sinfulness of sin on the one hand, and of the love of Christ on the other,—of the horror of being lost, and the blessedness of being saved, make us and keep us awake and earnest, until we come to that heavenly rest where none are weary and none silent for ever and ever!

ACTS, xx. 13-21.

13 And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.

14 And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene.

15 And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus.

16 For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul and the Elders of Ephesus. 143

WE have read of the interesting and eventful Sunday night passed by St. Paul and his friends in an upper room at Troas. At last day dawned ; the many lights were put out ; and the company assembled separated. St. Luke, with Gaius, Timotheus, and others of St. Paul's companions, set out by ship for Assos, and the apostle himself, anxious perhaps for a short season of retirement, walked for twenty miles along the coast to meet them. At Assos the whole party joined, and then sailed by Mitylene, Chios, Samos, and Trogyllium to Miletus. In this course they passed near to Ephesus. St. Paul, however, would not at this time stop there, as he was most anxious to reach Jerusalem in time for the feast of Pentecost ; but finding himself when at Miletus within twenty or thirty miles of Ephesus, he sent a message to the elders of that Church, desiring them to come to him at Miletus to receive some parting words of counsel and encouragement. They came accordingly, and we have in the verses which we have just read a portion of the apostle's beautiful and touching farewell address.

St. Paul appeals to the elders of the Ephesian Church, as those who knew and could testify as to his life and conversation in the midst of them. As an *example* to the flock he had gone in and out amongst them at all seasons, as the faithful servant of Christ, 'serving the Lord with all humility of mind.' Though an apostle, and one who had seen

the Lord Christ, still he did not set himself up as a lord over God's heritage; but behaved himself gently, and humbly, as one 'who had obtained mercy to be faithful.' He had passed through many dangers and trials from the lying in wait of the Jews. He had shed many tears, the outpouring of a tender heart which made him weep, as he tells us, over the 'enemies of the cross of Christ.' 'Remember,' he says, in the latter part of his address, 'that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one of you night and day *with tears*.' What a picture of holy fervour, and longing after the souls of those amongst whom he ministered does this mention of tears shed by the apostle set before us!

Moreover, St. Paul could say to all his converts, 'I desired not *yours*, but you.' He coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Nay, as he says, he 'wrought with labour and travail night and day, that he might not be burdensome to any;' and that too, so successfully, that over and above supplying his own wants he had something to spare for the necessities of others.

Let us not think that in speaking as he did of himself and his work the apostle was improperly boasting. Never was any man more ready to confess with shame and sorrow the course of ignorance and persecution which he once pursued; never did any man more heartily ascribe to God's grace, and

to that alone, all he *was*, and all he *did*, that was lovely and of good report. 'By the grace of God,' he said, 'I am what I am,' 'and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' To the praise of the glory of that grace alone,—to show what the Lord had done for him,—to give greater effect to his teaching,—to substantiate his claims as an apostle of Christ,—for these reasons and these only, did St. Paul venture to speak as he did of *how* he had *lived*, and *what* he had *taught*.

'*I kept back*,' he says, '*nothing that was profitable*.' '*I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*.' Amongst things *profitable* to his hearers there were doubtless some that they would not consider *pleasant*; still the apostle '*kept them not back*.' In '*all the counsel of God*' which he declared, were things that must clash with men's prejudices, and condemn their sins; still he did not shun to declare them. Medicine is as profitable for the sick man as food is for the hungry man. Reproof and warning are as needful for the sinner as comfort and encouragement for the humble Christian.

The main purport of St. Paul's teaching is thus described by himself, '*I have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and*

faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. These, as we have seen in the recorded sermons of the first preachers of the Gospel, are the great foundation truths on which they all chiefly dwell. Of course these branch out into very many points of Christian duty and practice; but these are at the bottom of all sound Gospel teaching. And repentance and faith always go together. It is not needful to say which comes first. They go hand in hand. A really believing look at Christ crucified for our sins melts the heart, breaks it, softens it. They who rightly look on Him whom they are conscious of having pierced by their sins, will mourn with godly sorrow. They again who repent of their sins aright, that is, are not only sorry for sin, but change their minds about it, struggle to be free from it, are ashamed of it, and (to the utmost of their power) forsake it,—such will surely welcome the glad tidings of a Saviour manifested to take away sin, and a blood which effectually cleanses from it. ‘Except ye repent,’ said Christ, ‘ye shall perish.’ ‘Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.’

ACTS, xx. 22-25.

22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there :

23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

ONE thing that strikes us at once in these words of St. Paul is, that, inspired apostle as he was, he had yet but a very partial and limited knowledge of what lay before him. He knew *generally* that bonds and afflictions awaited him in every city. This much the Holy Ghost had revealed to him. But what might be the particular form and character of the trials which he should undergo,—what things should befall him in Jerusalem, whither he felt ‘bound in the spirit’ to go,—whether he should die there or elsewhere,—this he knew not. In the

same way, writing to the Philippians, he speaks of his intention to 'send Timotheus to them, *as soon as he saw how it would go with him.*' That which we see here in the case of the Apostle Paul, we may see in the case of all God's prophets, apostles, evangelists, and other writers of the Scriptures. Speaking and writing as they did, 'moved by the Holy Ghost,' and *sometimes* having the veil which hides the future lifted up, and being able to tell of things far in the distance, still *commonly* they were in utter ignorance as to what lay before them. They might tell, as the mouthpieces of God the Holy Ghost, of some great event a thousand years distant, searching anxiously what, or what manner of time, the Spirit that was in them did testify; and yet of what should be on the morrow they might be profoundly ignorant. They like us had to walk by faith, and not by sight. They had to say as we have, 'If the Lord will,' with regard to all their plans and purposes. St. Paul only knew that he was to suffer,—not *where*, and *how*, and *when*. This has been already noticed in considering St. Paul's promise to return to his friends at Ephesus, if it were the Lord's will. (Chap. xviii. 21.) If it was good for the apostle, with all he had to do and to bear, thus to be kept in ignorance of the future, how can we complain if we see not the path before us? Rather, how thankful ought we to be that we *do* not, *can* not, *must* not know all that shall befall us,—that

‘the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,’—that it is our duty and privilege to commit our way to the Lord, who knows the future as well as the past, and to cast our care on Him who careth for us.

Although, however, St. Paul did not know exactly what should befall him, this much he *did* know, that bonds and afflictions awaited him go where he might. With what feelings did he contemplate such a prospect,—certainly not an encouraging one? ‘*None of these things,*’ he said, ‘*move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*’ Many a man would have been daunted by the certainty of meeting everywhere with opposition and persecution, bonds and imprisonment, and perhaps death. Not so the Apostle Paul. If his life must be sacrificed in the fulfilment of his ministry, he was quite ready to give it up. This only he longed for, above everything else, that he might complete joyfully his course, and testify fully and faithfully that gospel of God’s grace which he had received of the Lord Jesus.

How thoroughly the apostle’s holy longings were satisfied, we may see from his Second Epistle to Timothy, written about six years after this time, and shortly before his martyrdom, ‘I am now ready

to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.' If St. Paul's heart was so set upon the great work of testifying the gospel of the grace of God, that the certain prospect of danger, bonds, and most probably death, could not turn him back from it, do we not see what very high value he must have put upon the Gospel, and what very great importance he must have attached to the preaching of it?

And if we just think for a moment what '*the Gospel of the grace of God*' really is, we shall not wonder that St. Paul should think and speak so highly of it. The world is represented in the Bible as being in a state of spiritual sickness and condemnation. We look around us,—we look within us, and with shame and sadness we confess the witness true. We see and feel that we are naturally prone to evil and averse from good; soon tired of any religious work and service, whilst active and eager about earthly things. We see and feel that there are deep within us seeds of selfishness, pride, anger, which need but little watering from the tempter to spring up and bear bitter fruit. We read God's sentence against sin, and are forced to own it just.

In this our sad condition of weakness, helplessness, and corruption, the Gospel of Christ comes to us bringing messages of mercy; telling of a blood

that washes out all stains of sin,—of pardon for the guilty,—strength for the weak,—life for the dead. It tells of heaven forfeited by sin, but regained for sinners by Christ. It comes making a free offer of all that can be needed to lift up a sinful man to a portion and position amongst angels, near to the throne of God. It tells of a gracious Spirit, through whose mighty working the heart may be drawn away from what is vile, perishing, and deceitful, and sweetly influenced by the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart; and it declares in the plainest terms that God will give that blessed Spirit to them that ask Him. Is it any wonder that the heart of one like the Apostle Paul should be set upon proclaiming good tidings such as these? May God show us all what we are by nature, and what we *may* become, and (if we would be saved) *must* more or less become, by grace. May we find that '*gospel of the grace of God*,' which St. Paul at the risk of his life was so glad to testify, 'the power of God to our salvation.'

ACTS, xx. 26, 27.

26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

'I take you to record that I am pure from the blood of all men.' These are great words to use,—words which few but St. Paul surely could utter. In place of them, most ministers of these days would probably be rather ready to cry, 'Deliver us from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of our salvation, and our tongues shall sing of Thy righteousness.' We can hardly help being struck with the peculiar expression made use of by the apostle, when he speaks of being *'pure from the blood of all men.'* We know what it means for a man to be informed of an act of murder or suicide which he had tried with all his power to prevent, but tried in vain, having been at last committed, and to plead, 'I am clear of the blood of that poor creature; the responsibility of his death does not rest upon me.' But the apostle, in the words before us, does not speak of the death

of the body,—of any act of murder or self-destruction, however horrible, having to do with the body only. He refers to spiritual death and destruction—to the loss of the soul. It is as to this that he ventures with all truth and thankfulness,—with a full acknowledgment of what he owed to divine grace alone,—to say, ‘I have so faithfully warned the sinner,—so fully testified the Gospel of the grace of God, that if any one now goes on his way unsaved, unsanctified, and so perishes, his blood is on his own head,—I am clear of it.’ We saw the apostle using very similar language when reasoning at Corinth with some blaspheming Jews. (Chap. xviii. 6.) There is something very solemn in this mention of the blood of souls, and this question as to who is responsible for it. As to ministers, they ought to be heartily sympathised with, and earnestly prayed for, under the heavy responsibility which rests upon them. And as to ourselves, we must remember that we cannot shift our burden of responsibility upon ministers or any one else. In this sense, ‘every man must bear his own burden.’ If a minister is faithful we see plainly, from the words of St. Paul, that he is clear of guilt if men hear his message and reject it.

And supposing a minister to be unfaithful,—what then? If in any way through the unfaithfulness of the minister a man dies in his sins, still, if he perishes, it is surely small comfort to him to

be able at last to blame one who ought to have warned and led him, and instead of this misled him to his ruin. Suppose a keeper of a lighthouse were to sleep when he ought to have trimmed his lamps, and the light grew dim, and in a stormy night a ship were in consequence dashed on the rocks, and the crew perished; shameful as the conduct of that negligent light-keeper would be, it would make it none the less wretched for those shipwrecked creatures to be able with their dying breath to blame his carelessness.

‘*The blood of souls !*’ Let us bear in mind that it is possible to stab, and wound, and kill, a soul as well as a body. The murderer is justly hanged: the man who commits suicide is commonly in charity supposed to be out of his mind. If supposed to know what he was doing when he destroyed himself he is buried with every mark of disgrace. But for *one* who wounds and kills himself or others, there are *hundreds* who wrong their own souls. They starve them,—plunge them into the mire of sin,—blind them,—deceive them,—give them into the hands of the devil,—and draw them away from the loving grasp of that hand which was nailed for sinners to the cross, and which seeks to rescue them from death and shame.

May God of His great mercy keep us from the sin of spiritual suicide. ‘What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?’

or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' When a man deeply feels how unspeakably precious is the treasure which he carries within him,—his own soul,—how blessed is it for him to be able to say, 'Into Thy hands I commit it,' for life or death, for time or eternity, 'Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth!' How comforting to use St. Paul's own language, 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'

ACTS, xx. 28-31.

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

WE have seen what St. Paul said of the prospect before him, and his calm expectation of bonds and afflictions of which the Holy Ghost had forewarned him. Now let us see what he says of the prospect before the church of Ephesus. *'I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.'* St. John, writing most probably from Ephesus some thirty years after this,

speaks of there being many antichrists, and adds, 'They went out from us, but they were not of us.' Hymenæus and Alexander, Phygellus and Hermogenes, the two last specially mentioned as being amongst those in Asia who had turned away from St. Paul, are samples of these '*grievous wolves*' of whom the apostle speaks. Sad as it is to see perverters of the truth,—disturbers of peace, springing up in those very early days of the Church's history, under the very eyes of the apostles themselves, still there is a measure of comfort in it for us in these days. For now we see that it is no strange thing which happens to us, if from amongst ourselves there arise men speaking perverse things. We must not be surprised or disheartened if sometimes men who should *lead* the flock *mislead* it. So it was when apostles preached and wrote; so it will be to the end. The truth of the Gospel remains the same, though some reject, and others pervert it.

But if in old times, and no less in these days, false teachers must be expected to arise, there is all the more reason for St. Paul's earnest exhortation to the elders of Ephesus, and after them to all the faithful ministers of Christ, '*Take heed therefore unto yourselves.*' In like words does the apostle exhort Timothy, '*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine.*' Most necessary is it for those who would teach and lead others, to take good heed to their

own life and conversation. Can a minister expect to persuade others to believe and to practise that which his own life seems to show he does not credit and follow himself? How greatly then, do ministers need our prayers on their behalf, that the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of light, life, and love, would in all things direct and rule their hearts and lives.

Then further, 'take heed,' says the apostle, '*to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.*' Here, as in other places, comes out the distinct personality of the Holy Ghost. He it is who separates and appoints faithful ministers to the oversight of Christ's flock. None but God could do this; and He is truly God,—one with the Father and the Son. 'Now,' says the apostle, 'since you are called and commissioned to this high office by the Lord, the Spirit, see that you feed aright *the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.*'

In all the Bible there are no words which seem to bring before us more strongly and strikingly the greatness of the price paid for our redemption,—the exceeding great worth and preciousness of the salvation wrought out for us. God has '*purchased the Church with His own blood.*' Of course we know that God, simply as God, could not suffer, shed His blood, and die. But the Lord Jesus Christ, who

was at one and the same time both the Son of God and the Son of man, was so truly, essentially, eternally, God, that even in His deepest agony, when His blood was flowing on the bitter cross, there was Divine virtue in the blood so shed, and it might be truly called the blood of God with which He redeems His Church. And if indeed it be so, how well able must that precious blood be to cleanse from all sin; and how full to those who trust in it must be the safety, succour, and everlasting glory which it secures! 'Ye know,' says St. Peter, 'that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot;' a lamb slain in God's purpose before the foundation of the world,—slain in actual fact in the fulness of time; led to the slaughter meek, patient, and uncomplaining, yet all the while 'God over all blessed for ever.'

The blood of Abel cried from the ground for vengeance on the man who shed it. 'The blood of sprinkling' shed by Christ 'speaketh better things' by far, for it pleads for mercy and forgiveness for those on whose behalf it was shed. Every drop of it has a tongue; it is the blood of Him who *was* and *is* one with the Father,—the blood (we could not dare to use the word except the Holy Ghost, by the Apostle Paul, had done so) *of God*. What comfort should the thought bring to all who trust in Christ's

atoning sacrifice,—who wash in the fountain of His blood,—who day by day thank Him for His love, and His death. There *must* be, there *is* utterable worth in that death,—and that blood. There *must* be, there *is*, a boundless comprehensiveness in that love.

ACTS, xx. 32.

32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

‘I commend you to God.’ This language of the apostle Paul, addressed to the elders of the Ephesian church, was not a mere kind but unmeaning expression of good-will, such as is common amongst ourselves in our meetings and partings. When we take leave one of another, we commonly utter words which are really a prayer. For when we say ‘Good bye,’ what we really mean is, ‘God be with you!’ The words are merely a contraction of this sentence. Often, too, we say to a friend, ‘God bless you!’ It is to be feared, however, that with many the words are thoughtlessly spoken, and those who have parted with such expressions on their tongues do not really, when separate, wish and pray that God would be with and bless their friends. It was very different with St. Paul when leaving his Ephesian friends.

It was with him no unmeaning form to say, '*I commend you to God, and the word of His grace.*'

There *are* times,—there *will* yet be times in the history of all of us when we feel that for ourselves and those whom we love 'vain is the help of man.' There are separations, sad and perhaps final, as that of St. Paul and his friends in the case before us, when in utter helplessness we feel obliged to commit one another to God; for none other can go with those who are going,—none other remain with those who are left behind. Let us try to throw into the expression of our pious wishes something of the warmth and sincerity which characterised St. Paul's last words of love and prayer for his Ephesian converts. Let us take care for ourselves, and do our best to secure for our friends, that there may be for us and them, when far apart, the connecting links of a common Saviour, a common mercy-seat, a common hope, and a common home.

'I commend you to God, *who is able to build you up.*' We see at once that in the expression '*to build up,*' a figure is made use of by St. Paul; and it is that which we find in St. Peter's first Epistle, when, speaking of Christ as the great corner-stone and foundation of His Church, he says, 'To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable

to God by Jesus Christ.' (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.) St. Paul uses the same figure again in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he speaks of Christians as being 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone.' (Eph. ii. 20.) In building a dwelling there are many different processes to go through; as, for instance, hewing the stones, squaring, shaping, polishing, fitting, placing, cementing, piling up one upon another, until the topstone is reached. So in God's gracious dealings with those who are built up into an holy temple for Him, there is the hewing with the hammer of conviction, breaking the hard and stony heart; and then the shaping, polishing, fitting, by the word of God's grace and the operations of His Spirit; and the knitting of all together into one body by the cement of holy love. Now this building up, says St. Paul, God is able to do; and therefore in faith I commend you to Him, praying Him to make you strong and steadfast, and (unlike stones in any common building, which are dead and motionless) '*lively stones*,'—growing in grace, knowledge, and fruitfulness.

But whilst God—by the word of His grace, by the work of His Spirit, in different ways and by different means—builds up Christians, training them for His service here and for His kingdom above, let us not lose sight of those words of St. Jude, 'Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your

most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God.' (Jude, 20, 21.) Here, as in many other places, the great lesson is taught us that we are to be workers together with God. God builds, but we are to build too. He who will not work, and watch, and pray, must not expect to be built up by God. It is far more likely that another and vastly different builder will help him to build up for himself a refuge of lies, and to daub the walls of it with untempered mortar; and will say, 'Peace, peace, where there is no peace,' and so lead him on self-deceived to ruin.

'*And to give you an inheritance amongst all them which are sanctified.*' The sanctified here spoken of are the saints elsewhere mentioned; as St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians writes 'to them that are sanctified, called to be saints.' Again and again we meet with the word 'saints' in St. Paul's Epistles. It seemed a word very dear to him. There have been those who have used the word in the way of ridicule and reproach, as belonging to 'over-good people,' as they called them, who were rather to be pitied than imitated. But the word is not of man's invention. It is God's own word for His own people. It is a title of honour, and not of reproach.

Only let us see what is the great lesson to be learnt from St. Paul's mention of '*an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified*;' or, as it is else-

where, 'the inheritance of the saints in light.' We have seen that 'saints' and 'sanctified ones' are the same. The words mean 'holy people,'—separated people. Not those, and those only, who are *perfectly* holy,—*perfectly* free from sin. To the last hour of our lives it must be true that, 'if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' But still those who are on their way to heaven,—those who will reach it,—are such as at least bewail their imperfection and sin,—such as aim at holiness, pray for it, long for it, labour for it. St. Paul, in describing the commission given to him at his conversion, says he was sent 'to open men's eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light . . . that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance amongst them which are sanctified by faith.' 'Sanctified by faith,'—commonly we speak of being 'justified by faith;' both are true. Whom God justifies them He also sanctifies. An unholy faith is no faith at all. May our faith rest firmly and strongly upon the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and our 'following after holiness' show a growing meetness for heaven!

ACTS, xx. 33-38.

33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

35 I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,

38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

WE have dwelt at some length upon St. Paul's address to the elders of the church of Ephesus, because of its deeply interesting and affecting character and the very important truths which it brings before us. There are only a few more words of it now to consider. St. Paul refers to his own life of holy self-denial ; to the industry with which he had laboured with his own hands, not only for his own maintenance, but for the help also of his companions in the Lord's work. He reminds his hearers how

often he had urged them in like manner to labour for the support of the weak and needy; '*remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said* (or 'used to say,' as it should be rather), *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*' We have not anywhere in the Gospel such a saying of our Lord's as this recorded. Yet it is perfectly plain from the way in which St. Paul refers to it, that it was a saying very well known to the early Christians. In all likelihood it was a sort of maxim of sacred truth which often fell from our Lord's lips, and one which passed often from mouth to mouth amongst His disciples.

It is well that we have such high authority as that of Christ Himself in favour of the superior blessedness of giving to receiving. For certainly the general opinion of the world is very different. Most men count it the height of happiness to *receive* largely and *keep* safely; and they would be disposed to reverse the Saviour's words, and to say, 'It is more blessed to receive than to give.' We are quite sure, however, that Jesus must have been right. Let us try and discover some of the grounds on which this holy saying of the Lord rests. Why is it more blessed to give than to receive? *It is more like God.* God *receives* nothing. 'Who hath first given unto Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again.' (Rom. xi. 35.) But God is unceasingly *giving*. From Him cometh down every good and perfect gift. And did not Christ give Himself for us? He never taught

any lesson which He did not exemplify. He gave up all, that He might give Himself for all. It must be our safest, happiest, wisest course to follow, though it be at an infinite distance, His lovely example.

It is more blessed to give than to receive, because (supposing the giving to be done in a right spirit and from a right motive) *it is the evidence of a better, holier state of heart.* In receiving there is nothing which shows the heart to be right; whilst self-denying liberality is one of the beautiful fruits of the Spirit, who first opens the heart and then the hand.

It is more blessed to give than to receive, because it is more beneficial both to the giver himself and to those to whom he gives. The receiver benefits himself, and perhaps his own family and those nearly connected with him. But the liberal Christian giver does far more extensive good. He benefits indeed first the receiver by timely aid and kindly help; but he benefits also himself, for by the very act of giving from a right motive he confirms in himself the grace of love; he strengthens in himself the habit of giving, and so improves his own soul and enriches it with most precious treasure. Besides, the liberal Christian does good to the world around,—adorns religion,—conciliates enemies,—and provokes others to love and good works.

And let us not be afraid to add that giving is

more blessed than receiving, *because it ensures a higher reward.* Salvation is, of course, from first to last all of grace. When we 'have done all that is commanded us' (and who can say he has done that?) we can but 'say we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which it was our duty to do.' But whilst we cannot be *justified* by our works, we shall be *judged* by them,—judged by them as being fruits, tests, and evidences of faith. Our Lord Himself tells us that He is coming shortly,—'His reward with Him, to give to every man as his work shall be.' (Rev. xxii. 12.) And we have only to look at His own account of the last judgment, in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, to see how exactly He notices and how surely He will reward the Christian of kindly heart and open hand, who gives his gold, if he has it, for His sick and poor, and a cup of cold water or a half-hour of patient labour, if he has nothing more to offer.

With this lesson, then, of the happiness of self-denying Christian liberality, St. Paul closes his address to the elders of Ephesus. The last words which he will leave with them are words spoken by his Divine Master.

And then came the parting scene. We have seen how St. Paul had said, 'I commend you to God;' the very last thing before they separated, to meet no more on this side of the grave, should be united prayer. '*When he had thus spoken, he kneeled down,*

and prayed with them all. ‘*He kneeled down;*’ again, in the very next chapter, in company with Christians at Tyre, it is said, ‘*we kneeled down on the shore.*’ Jesus in His agony *kneeled* in Gethsemane, and then fell on His face. St. Stephen *kneeled* in prayer whilst being stoned. It is true there may be a bent knee and yet a careless, prayerless heart; but, on the other hand, there will hardly be a contrite heart and a humble mind without the knee being, if at all possible, bent in lowly adoration.

When St. Paul and his friends rose up from prayer, the last embraces were given; and he and they were not ashamed to weep. There was nothing weak and womanly about such tears. If ever there was a man brave, and firm, and strong-minded, it was St. Paul. At the same time none was ever more tender-hearted. By God’s blessing upon the apostle’s faithful, loving labours, these Ephesians had been brought out of darkness and degradation, and raised to light and liberty. And now he was leaving them, no more to return. This it was that cut them to the heart. They should hear his voice and see his face no more. In dangers and perplexities he would be no more at hand to counsel and comfort.

Nothing can exceed the lovely naturalness with which the story is told. We seem to see the whole scene before us. The little company kneeling down in solemn prayer,—then the last affectionate em-

braces,—one after another taking a last and long farewell amidst sobs and tears,—then the sad and all but silent procession to the ship, the hearts of all but the apostle himself too heavy to speak,—and he, firm and strong as ever, comforting his weeping friends by dropping every now and then a word of joyful hope.

Deeply did those parting counsels sink into the hearts of the Ephesian elders; and richly (as we learn from St. Paul's Epistle to their church) were those parting prayers on their behalf answered. May it not be without some profit to ourselves that we have dwelt a little on words so solemn, spoken under circumstances so deeply interesting and affecting.

ACTS, xxi. 1-5.

1 And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara :

2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.

3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre : for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days : who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way ; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city : and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

WE last saw St. Paul taking at Miletus an affectionate leave of his Ephesian friends. It would seem from St. Luke's story, that the parting interview was somewhat hurried by the necessity of immediate departure. The wind was fair, and the vessel must take advantage of it, and sail at once.

She would easily run down to Coos in about six hours,—a distance of about forty miles. Then some fifty miles more would bring her to Rhodes. A short sail from that island across to the mainland brought St. Paul and his company to Patara. In the harbour of Patara they found a vessel which was on the point of crossing the open sea to Phœnicia. They went on board at once, and, after a run of about three hundred and twenty miles, anchored in the port of Tyre. Tyre was not the destination of the vessel; but she had merchandise to discharge there,—probably grain from the Black Sea, or wine from the Archipelago,—and a fresh cargo of Phœnician wares to take on board. This unloading and relading of the vessel occupied a full week; and during this time St. Paul and his companions sought out and found disciples. No doubt, as he had done at Troas, so here he would preach to them, and break bread with them on the Lord's day, and hold pleasant Christian intercourse with them, under the deeply solemnizing conviction that here too the meeting was for the last time.

Disciples found at Tyre: we naturally ask, when we hear of this, how did they come there? We read of our blessed Lord going into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and, when there, casting a devil out of the child of a poor Syrophœnician woman. That work of mercy must have stirred inquiry; and the words which fell from the great Healer's lips may

well have proved good seed which afterwards bore good fruit. Also, amongst those who were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, there were some who travelled as far as Phœnicia, in which Tyre was situated, preaching the Gospel. St. Paul, too, himself had visited Tyre on his way from Antioch to Jerusalem. Thus in different ways had the good seed been sown amongst a people for the most part sitting in heathen darkness. It seems from the expression, 'finding disciples,' as if they were but a small company, and needed some searching out. If few in number they were warm-hearted and affectionate, and also were under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, who revealed to them in some measure things yet future.

During the stay of St. Paul and his companions at Tyre, the disciples there said to the apostle through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit revealed to them that he should be bound there. The very same thing, as we have already seen, had been revealed to St. Paul himself. (Chap. xx. 23.) But then the Holy Ghost had done more for the apostle. He had not only foreshown the future to him, but had also taught him how to act under the circumstances foreshown. 'I go,' said he, 'bound in the Spirit,'—constrained by the Holy Spirit's guidance,—'to Jerusalem.' And we see further on in the chapter now before us, that those very persons who had

tried to keep the apostle from going up to Jerusalem at last acquiesced in his determination to go, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.' There is a lesson to be learnt from this little incident,—a lesson of humility and self-distrust. Those disciples at Tyre were perfectly right in forecasting for St. Paul bonds and imprisonment. This much they had been shown by the Spirit Himself. They were *wrong*, however, in drawing the conclusion that therefore St. Paul should not go to Jerusalem. It was God's will and purpose that the apostle *should* go there, and testify *there* first, and afterwards at Rome; and this St. Paul himself was taught. Their love was warm, but their knowledge was partial. In a similar way we may think that we have discovered some plain truth from God's Word; but it is quite possible that to others of our fellow-Christians that truth may not be equally plain; or it may be qualified by some other truth equally plain and important. More may be revealed to others than to us; and we should be slow to think and speak hardly of a brother who, seeking like us God's teaching, thinks his path of duty to lie in a somewhat different direction from ours.

And now that short week of happy and profitable Christian intercourse came to an end. The ship had received her cargo, and was ready to sail, and St. Paul and his company set out from the city to the harbour. Once more there was a sorrowful pro-

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cession as before at Miletus. There it was the elders of the Ephesian Church of whom the apostle had to take leave. Here, at Tyre, the disciples accompanied St. Paul and his friends to the ship, '*with wives and children.*' It was a kind of family parting. No doubt those Christians of Tyre, who had themselves learnt so much from the kind teacher whom they were losing, wished their children, as long as they lived, to remember him with reverence and affection, and to treasure up his last words. Perhaps, too, they wished that his hands should be laid upon their children's heads with last words of blessing.

Then when they reached a quiet spot on the sandy shore, they all kneeled down and prayed. Some centuries afterwards the spot where this holy and affecting farewell is supposed to have taken place was shown. It was an open space, still to be seen on the western shore of Tyre, between the houses of the city and the sea. We saw St. Paul joining in prayer at parting with the elders of Ephesus. Now once again, at parting with the disciples at Tyre, prayer is offered. St. Luke says, '*We kneeled down on the shore and prayed.*' More than one voice, then, may have been lifted up in prayer. St. Paul, St. Luke, and perhaps others, may have prayed in turn. And was there ever a more solemn and more deeply interesting prayer-meeting than that? The blue canopy of heaven

overhead,—the knees of the worshippers prest on the sand of the shore,—the murmuring of the waves mingling with sounds of supplication,—close riding at anchor, at a little distance off, the ship which was to carry away the beloved teacher to bonds, if not to death,—little children scarcely understanding the full meaning of all that was going on, but taught to kneel with their elders, and awed and saddened by the sound of sobs mingled with words of prayer,—we seem, as in the case of the parting at Miletus, to have the whole scene before us; and whilst we look at it we are reminded, what a natural and blessed resource prayer is for Christians when called to part;—we see that a sandy shore as well as a consecrated temple may be holy ground, and that children may fitly and wisely be taught to join in services that they cannot be expected quite fully to enter into;—we see too that the religion of Christ enlarges the heart, warms it, calls forth its best affections; and that he who has learnt to love God finds it no hard matter to love his brother also.

ACTS, xxi. 6-14.

6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship ; and they returned home again.

7 And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cæsarea : and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven ; and abode with him.

9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Agabus.

11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart ? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

AFTER St. Paul and his friends had joined in

prayer on the shore of Tyre there was an affectionate leave-taking, and, the disciples returning to their own homes, the apostle and his company sailed away from Tyre to Ptolemais. This voyage only occupied one day. At Ptolemais the ship was left; friendly salutations were exchanged with the brethren who were found there, and, after one day's rest, St. Paul and his companions went a land journey of some thirty miles to Cæsarea.

At Cæsarea there was a Christian family from whom they were sure of receiving a hearty welcome,—that of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven deacons spoken of in the sixth chapter. The last time we heard of Philip was when, after instructing and baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and carried to Azotus, from whence he went, preaching in all the cities which lay in his way, to Cæsarea. There Philip seems to have settled; though very probably from this place he every now and then went forth on missionary journeys through Judæa.

Philip had four daughters in whom the prophecy of Joel had received a literal accomplishment, 'It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and *your daughters shall prophesy*, . . . and also upon the servants and upon the *handmaids* in those days will I pour out my Spirit.' (Joel, ii. 28, 29.) St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, speaks of

Christ as having, after His glorious ascension, received gifts for men, and bestowed them upon His Church. 'And,' he adds, 'He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.' (Eph. iv. 11, 12.) In the house of Philip there were gathered together, St. Paul the apostle, St. Philip the evangelist, St. Luke a teacher, and an evangelist in the sense in which we now more commonly use the word as a writer of a gospel; and to add to the list there were some on whom the gift of prophecy had been bestowed,—Philip's four daughters. These women had to a certain extent a knowledge given them of things to come,—a power of prophetic utterance. And although from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians we clearly learn that women were not free to exercise this gift in the congregation, they would not be prohibited from declaring what they knew of God's purposes in a small circle of friends gathered under one roof. And when we think of what that company of friends was composed, we can easily conceive how deeply interesting and profitable must have been the Christian intercourse which was enjoyed by such men and such women, discoursing together of things concerning the common salvation.

Probably Philip's daughters were the first to

speaking of the troubles and sufferings for Christ's sake which lay before the apostle Paul. Soon, however, came one who spoke much more plainly. The apostle '*tarried many days*' at Cæsarea; long enough for the news of his approach to reach Jerusalem; and a prophet named Agabus (the same who is spoken of in the eleventh chapter as having foretold at Antioch an approaching time of famine) appeared in Cæsarea, having come down from Jerusalem to forewarn St. Paul of the dangers and trials before him. This man presented himself in Philip's house, and taking Paul's girdle, '*bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.*' We know that the prophets of old were accustomed to make use of outward signs to teach important lessons, or to show forcibly things to come. Thus it was in the cases of Samuel, Ahijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others. The prediction of Agabus was, as we know, soon fulfilled; and as St. Paul had been already so forewarned by the Spirit as not to be at all taken by surprise by that prediction, so, when the time came, he was found ready with faith, patience, and courage, to bear its accomplishment.

The words of Agabus, together with his significant actions, gave rise to like entreaties with those which the disciples at Tyre had made to the apostle,

not to venture into the predicted danger. ‘*When we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.*’ Notwithstanding, however, all their pleadings, the apostle persisted in his purpose. And this was not from mere obstinacy. Twice before St. Paul had yielded to the wishes of his friends in consulting his own personal safety. When, soon after his conversion, the Jews watched the gates of Damascus to kill him, he allowed the disciples to take him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket. At the advice again of his friends, he had consented not to venture into the theatre at Ephesus, at the time of the riot raised by Demetrius.

Now however, as we have seen already, the Holy Ghost had not only shown him that bonds and imprisonment were before him, but had pointed out to him that his path of duty was to encounter and endure them. We must not think, however, that the apostle was not deeply moved by the tears and entreaties of his affectionate friends. What he felt is plainly shown by his own words, ‘*What mean ye to weep and to break my heart?*’ The warm love shown to him,—the deep anxiety for his safety,—the entreaties, enforced with tears, that he would, for their sakes as well as his own, be warned and avoid the threatened danger,—all this touched him to the quick. It was almost more than he could bear; and he begged that a scene so painful might

not be prolonged, for his course was clear, and he dreaded anything which might make flesh and blood shrink from it. '*I am ready,*' he said, '*not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*'

With deepest grief, but with admiring reverence, the apostle's friends saw and respected his lofty motives, his ardent love to his Master, his holy zeal and courage; so they ceased their importunities, saying, '*The will of the Lord be done.*' Words these soon said, but often, it is to be feared, little felt,—little meant; but by those loving, sorrowing friends, fervently, solemnly prayed. We often say such words in the Lord's prayer, 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.' Do we truly pray those words? Do we wish what we ask for? Sometimes, too, when men are baffled in some scheme,—when they suffer loss or bereavement, they say, 'God's will be done;' but the words mean, too often, no more than this, 'I cannot help myself,—God's Providence is stronger than I am,—I must submit.' In all this there is nothing of true humility and faith. It was otherwise with those Christians at Cæsarea. As soon as they found out what God's will about their beloved friend and teacher really was, they *dared* not, *would* not any more oppose it. They dried their tears, ceased their entreaties, and exclaimed devoutly, '*The will of the Lord be done.*' From them, and from St. Paul, let us learn useful

lessons. From *them* that the will of God when clearly known must regulate, and, if need be, even over-rule natural feelings. It may be very hard to lose a friend, but if it be God's will to take him, obedience to that will is good for us, and for him. And from *St. Paul* there are a hundred lessons to be learnt, of love, devotion, self-sacrifice, courage, and patient endurance. And all may be summed up in his own words, 'Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ.'

ACTS, xxi. 15-26.

15 And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

16 There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe: and they are all zealous of the law:

21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews, which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them:

24 Them take and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all

may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing ; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

WE have seen that St. Paul's affectionate friends at Cæsarea, when thoroughly satisfied that it was the Lord's will that he should go up to Jerusalem, ceased from endeavouring to dissuade him from doing so. And not only this, but they showed their readiness to forward his views by some of their number accompanying him to Jerusalem ; taking with them an old disciple, a native of Cyprus, Mnason by name, at whose house in Jerusalem St. Paul and his friends would find lodging.

'*After those days we took up our carriages ;*' the words are awkward, and seem likely to give a wrong impression. The real meaning of the original is, 'having packed up,'—'having made all needful preparations for our journey.' We do not know how St. Paul travelled, but most certainly it would be in a plain and inexpensive way. The expression '*we took up our carriages,*' would rather make us think of a costly way of journeying ; whereas the needful

preparation for the journey is what is spoken of. And the mention of 'packing up,' and of the provision made for lodging in Jerusalem, is just one of those little natural touches which give such life and reality to the Bible story ;—just one of those things which remind us that apostles, and other great and good men of whom we read, were men of like passions with ourselves ; and had to eat and drink, and rest and sleep, and pack and unpack, and sail in ships, or be conveyed in other ways, and often walk for want of other modes of conveyance, as any of us might do.

When St. Paul and his friends reached Jerusalem, they met with a hearty welcome from the brethren there. Then, after a night's rest, a gathering was called of the elders under the presidency of James, who was then Bishop of Jerusalem, and St. Paul appeared amongst them to make his report of that which it had pleased God to do by his instrumentality. His account of the things which God had by him wrought amongst the Gentiles called forth the liveliest expressions of joy and thankfulness.

Then followed anxious consideration of the best means of confirming in the Christian faith, the Jews amongst their number who believed, and who yet were not wholly free from their attachment to the ceremonial law,—‘the handwriting of ordinances’ of which St. Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Colossians.

It seems that there were just at that time at Jerusalem four men,—Jews; but brought to faith in Christ,—who were bound by a Nazarite's vow. The nature of this vow we have already had under consideration in reading chap. xviii. We have full instructions concerning it in the sixth chapter of Numbers. The advice of St. James and the elders was, that St. Paul should join with these four men in their vow,—that he should separate and sanctify himself as a Nazarite for a time, with them; and that, when the time for which the vow was in force was fulfilled, he should take them to the priests, give the requisite formal notice of the time having expired, and make himself responsible for the payment of the fees for sacrifices to be offered, and services to be performed, before the men and himself could be released from the vow. Some little time (after the formal notice had been given) must of necessity elapse before they could be thus released; for the priests must be satisfied as to the conditions of the vow having been properly fulfilled. St. Paul, as the representative of the four men and himself who had taken part with them in the vow, had to continue to act for them during that time. This explains what is said of the apostle being found about the end of the seven days purified as a Nazarite in the temple.

We have already seen, when considering other incidents in the apostle's history, what were the motives which influenced him in such matters as

these. Acting as a Jew,—dealing with Jews,—he conformed as far as he safely could with their habits, feelings, and prejudices, and their attachment to the ceremonial law, in order to win them to receive the Gospel; and to draw them to Christ, whom it was his delight to preach as ‘the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.’ In his own noble words, ‘I am become all things to all men, if by any means I may save some.’

The great practical lesson which we should learn from this part of St. Paul’s history seems to be this, that we are only to fall in with the fancies, feelings, and prejudices of others in so far as by acting thus we can do them good, lead them in the right way, gain access for the truth to their hearts, and so glorify God. We are too often tempted, in order to please our companions, to wink at sin,—to shut our ears to bad language or even to laugh at it,—to go where we know there is danger,—to shut up our Bibles, and waste or profane the Sabbath; and all this to conciliate some gay and godless friend. Acting thus, we instead of (like St. Paul) becoming all things to all men to *save* them, we become so to *ruin* them; we are ‘partakers in their sins.’ It is one thing to take care not to *offend* a weak brother, and quite another to *mislead* him. In things *lawful*, it is right, and wise, and kind, to give up our own likings, and to exercise self-denial; in things *unlawful*, it is treason against God, and cruelty to our

brethren, to yield to the solicitations, and follow the example, of the ungodly. If we would be the 'sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty,' we must 'come out and be separate' from an evil world; and neither 'touch the unclean thing' ourselves, nor encourage others in doing so.

ACTS, xxi. 27-40.

27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him.

28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

40 And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue.

IN the verses which we have just read we see St. Paul, as often before in his history, misunderstood, misrepresented, persecuted, and all but killed. Of course there could, under ordinary circumstances, be nothing in a Jew joining with other Jews in a religious vow, worshipping and offering sacrifices in the temple, that any one could with any reason find fault with. It would seem that the Jews of Jerusalem were satisfied with St. Paul's compliance with the requirements of the ceremonial law; but that those of Asia who had come up for the Feast, and had been disappointed by his escape from their hands at Ephesus, were of another mind. They had seen with the apostle his friend Trophimus, an Ephesian, one of St. Paul's companions in travel, mentioned in the twentieth chapter, and a Gentile. Without satisfy-

ing themselves by any inquiry about the matter, they thought,—or pretended to think,—that St. Paul had brought this man into the temple, and had thus polluted the holy place. To bring Gentiles into the temple, (that is, beyond the outer court which was called the court of the Gentiles,) was a capital offence, punishable with death. The cry ran, then, from mouth to mouth, ‘*Men of Israel, help : This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place : and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.*’

The crowd (soon drawn together by such an outcry) came surging towards the temple ; and then some seized upon the apostle, and dragged him forth. And now St. Paul seemed to be on the point of undergoing exactly that which he had himself sanctioned and assisted in, when Stephen won his martyr’s crown,—that is, being stoned to death in a popular outbreak. He had however, yet more to do, and more to suffer ; his time was not yet come. So then, whilst he was being very roughly handled, beaten, and dragged hither and thither, word came to the captain of the Roman garrison of a thousand men, quartered in the castle and fort of Antonia, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He, accordingly, took soldiers and officers, and ran down to the crowd just in time to save the apostle’s life. Then, as if he had been the most daring and dangerous of malefactors, he commanded St. Paul to be bound with two chains,

and set about examining into the nature of his crimes. Thus we see the intimation of the Spirit (confirmed as it had been by the prophecy of Agabus) that bonds awaited the apostle in Jerusalem, fully accomplished. That which had been foretold had come to pass. The *prospect* of all this hard usage and peril had not moved St. Paul; the *endurance* of it did not come upon him as a strange thing.

In reply to questions as to '*who he was and what he had done,*' there arose a confused hubbub of voices which made it so impossible to get at the truth, that the chief captain commanded him to be taken into the castle, that he might there have an opportunity of finding out more about him. Whilst being taken thither, the people, fearing perhaps lest he should escape them, became so much more angry and excited, that, to prevent his being torn in pieces by them, he had absolutely to be carried by the soldiers; for the multitude followed him with just such a cry as they had given utterance to in the case of his Divine Master in the streets of the same city some twenty-seven years before, 'Away with him! Away with him!'

As St. Paul was being led into the castle, he addressed the chief captain in the Greek language, much to his surprise; for the angry tumult raised amongst the people had led him to think that this must be an old offender,—an Egyptian,—a false prophet, who had predicted the destruction of Jerusa-

lem about five years before this time, and had led out a great multitude (Josephus says, thirty thousand) to the Mount of Olives to see the city fall. This man and his followers had been routed by Felix; he himself, however, had escaped; and the chief captain seemed to think that St. Paul might be this very man, once again appearing to stir up tumult and sedition in the city.

In answer to the questions of the chief captain, St. Paul explained that he was no Egyptian, but a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a city of considerable reputation, and, as we find in the next chapter, one which conferred on those born there all the privileges of Roman citizenship. And now all that the apostle asked for was that he might be allowed to address his countrymen, and explain who he was, and what he was doing. So then, still guarded and fettered, from the strange pulpit of the stairs of a Roman fortress, St. Paul began his defence. Something in his manner and gesture, and still more the power of Him who alone can 'order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men,' hushed the clamour of noisy tongues; and amidst 'a great silence' the apostle commenced.

Does it seem strange to us that the man who amongst his converts was 'gentle as a nurse cherishing her children,' should be suspected of being a leader of sedition,—a dangerous character requiring to be bound in chains? Let us remember what was

said and thought of our blessed Lord. He was called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, and was said to cast out devils by the prince of the devils. 'If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more would they call them of his household.' Christians must expect to be misunderstood and misrepresented. Only let us take care that we give no occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and then we may safely leave our characters in God's hands. He made ravens to feed his prophet Elijah, and heathen Romans (who were at last, when the fit time came, his executioners) to protect his apostle Paul. He will 'hide those that trust in Him in the secret of His presence from the pride of man: and keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.' (Ps. xxxi. 20.)

ACTS, xxii. 1-16.

1 Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.

2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence : and he saith,)

3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders : from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?

8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid ; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord ? And the Lord said

unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

THE first words spoken by St. Paul in his defence, of which we have just read a portion, arrested the attention of his hearers, for they were spoken in the Hebrew tongue, the loved and sacred language of the Jewish nation. The people felt at once that the speaker was really that which he claimed to be—a Jew—a son of Abraham, and therefore worthy at least of being listened to.

In what follows St. Paul reviews his early life and training, and the circumstances of his wonderful conversion. We have considered this when reading the ninth chapter. If we find in the account of his conversion, given by the apostle in the twenty-second and twenty-sixth chapters, some things differ-

ing a little from the first account, we must not therefore think that there is any contradiction in the Scripture narratives. We can easily understand that there would necessarily be some little difference between St. Paul's own account of what happened to himself, and the accounts which St. Luke was inspired by the Holy Spirit to give. Some things, the apostle, dazzled and blinded by the glorious appearance of the Saviour, terrified by the voice which came from the excellent glory, could not tell so fully as another could. The three accounts of St. Paul's conversion taken together make up one beautiful picture, one complete and most instructive story.

We must remember that St. Paul was addressing Jews—men proud of their national distinction, and making their boast of the law. To such he says, 'I, too, am a Jew, taught and trained in the strictest manner by one of your most noted teachers of the law—Gamaliel. If you are jealous for the law, and scrupulous about its observances, I was yet more so. To me the name and the religion of Jesus of Nazareth were utterly hateful; and I showed my determination to root out what I considered a pestilent heresy, by persecuting to the death those who professed it. Of this I need no other evidence than you have in the midst of you—the high-priest and the elders, who themselves furnished me with letters of authority to bring any Christians whom I might

find at Damascus to Jerusalem to be punished. Commonly, when men have gone wrong, they do not like to be reminded of what they *were*, and what they *did*. But it was otherwise with St. Paul. He never hesitated to speak humbly, and penitently, of his past days of darkness, in order to magnify the grace of God which wrought in him such a marvellous change. All that he once prided himself upon he learned to give up; all that he once hated and despised he learned to love and embrace. And his story, as well as that of thousands more, only shows us how very real, and very great, is the change which takes place in a man, when once he comes truly to believe in Christ, and deeply feels that Jesus of Nazareth died for him, and is his only Saviour.

In the ninth chapter we are simply told of Saul when he rose from the earth to which he had been struck down, being 'able to see no man,' and being afterwards 'three days without sight.' In the chapter which we are now reading, the apostle himself distinctly explains that he '*could not see for the glory of that light*;'—the light which shone around the person of Christ revealed to him. And then, putting together the two accounts given in the ninth and twenty-second chapters of what good Ananias said to Saul on his regaining his sight, we have it thus, 'Brother Saul, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that

Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth ;' and He himself, that Just One—'the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.' We have, in these words, one of those incidental notices which we meet with from time to time in the Bible, of the joint action of the three persons of the sacred Trinity in matters which have to do with man's salvation. '*The God of our fathers,*' said Ananias, 'hath chosen thee, to know His will, and to see that Just One;' *Jesus of Nazareth* has accordingly appeared to thee; and with thy recovered sight thou shalt be filled with *the Holy Ghost*. Thus by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one glorious Godhead, was this 'chosen vessel' prepared and anointed to be a witness for Christ; to tell by word of mouth, and by pen, to the men of those days, and to all men, even to the end of time, the great and wonderful story of his conversion.

'*That thou shouldest see that Just One;*' this very title was used by St. Stephen in speaking of Christ just before his death; when he accused the Jews of killing those who prophesied of 'the coming of the Just One.' And when we remember that St. Paul—then Saul—listened to the pleadings of the martyr, and, unmoved by them, assisted in his murder, must not those words of holy Stephen have

come back upon him with convicting power, when it was said to him, 'that Just One of whose coming thou wouldest not hear, thou hast seen; and seen, too, that thou mightest be a witness of Him amongst Jews and Gentiles.'

And yet other words we are able to add to the account in the ninth chapter of what Ananias said: '*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord.*' We must remember that St. Paul had been three days wrestling in prayer; he was deeply penitent, and thoroughly convinced of the power, and grace, and glory of that Jesus whom he had been persecuting; as a penitent believer, then, he had really obtained forgiveness; but baptism was to be to him the blessed sign and assurance of such forgiveness; it was God's seal affixed to the charter of pardon; it was a formal admission into the blessings of the Christian Church. In short, we should take along with the words of Ananias, those of St. Peter when, speaking of baptism, he says, 'It doth now save us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.'

The day comes on quickly when we too shall 'see that Just One;' for when 'He cometh with clouds *every eye* shall see Him.' And the only way in which we can hope to meet Him with comfort and confidence *then*, is to see Him *now* with the eye

of faith as a real, a near, a living, a loving Friend ; as *real*, and vastly more concerned for our good than the father whom we honour, or the wife we cherish, or the friend who is closer to us than a brother. If we do but *thus* see Jesus, and *feel* that He truly died for us, and longs to have us with Himself, we shall know something of St. Paul's holy longing to depart and be with Christ 'for ever.'

ACTS, xxii. 17-22.

17 And it came to pass that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

IN the ninth chapter of this book we read of St. Paul, after his conversion, tarrying some days at Damascus, and then coming to Jerusalem, and there being at first regarded with some shyness by the disciples, until Barnabas took him by the hand, and explained to them the circumstances of his conversion. In the twenty-second chapter we hear for the first time of a communication made to the apostle,

whilst praying in the temple, by the Lord whom he had seen in the way to Damascus, warning him that the Jews would not hearken to his testimony, and that for safety's sake it was needful for him to leave Jerusalem at once. In the ninth chapter we are told that when the brethren knew that the Jews went about to slay him, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him on to Tarsus. St. Paul, in his defence at Jerusalem, tells us that he was warned to leave Jerusalem by Christ Himself. The two statements fit in beautifully one with the other. The voice from heaven agreed exactly with the solicitations of the apostle's friends; both pointed in the same direction, and showed clearly the path of duty.

It was not at all unnatural that, when the Lord warned St. Paul that the Jews would not receive his testimony concerning Him, the apostle should express his astonishment. It seemed to him almost incredible that, after the amazing change wrought in him which was so universally known, they should refuse to give credit to the man so changed. '*I said,*' continues St. Paul in his defence, '*Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee : and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.*' Here was a man the whole course of whose life was reversed; everything with him had

been turned upside down; the persecutor of the faith had become a preacher of it; the man who imprisoned God's saints was quite ready to go to prison, and *did often* so go for Christ's sake; he who had helped in the stoning of holy Stephen was quite willing to be stoned, and actually *was* stoned, for the truth which Stephen died confessing. It seemed to St. Paul impossible, that those who had known all his previous life and history should stand out against such convincing evidence as was furnished by the change that had taken place in his heart and life, his thoughts and actions.

The Lord, however, knew more perfectly than his servant the strength of prejudice, and the blinding influence of determined unbelief. He therefore met St. Paul's arguments with the plain and peremptory command, '*Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.*'

At the mention of that hated word, '*Gentiles,*' the apostle's address was cut short by fresh uproar. A hundred voices shouted out, '*Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live.*' Could anything be more utterly unreasonable and inconsistent than the conduct of those Jews? They would not themselves receive the gospel message; they thought scorn of Jesus of Nazareth; they 'put from them everlasting life;' and yet when the slightest mention was made of the blessings which they rejected being offered to the Gentiles,

then their anger was more than ever aroused, and they were ready to kill the man who spoke of such a thing. The story reminds us of our Lord’s words, when—speaking of the Scribes and Pharisees of his days—he said to them, ‘Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.’

We have something of the same kind amongst ourselves in these days. We see people who not only will not be religious themselves, but do their utmost to prevent others from being so. This looks strange at first sight ; but when we come to think about it we shall find some things to explain it. When a man is conscious of going in a wrong way, he likes to have company with him. It makes him feel a little more comfortable if others go along with him. His conscience would give him many a twinge if he were all alone ; whereas if he sees others travelling in the same direction he tries to make himself think that *all* cannot be wrong, and so possibly *he* may be safe. Besides which, as soon as ever a man gives himself up to be the devil’s *dupe*, he becomes at once the devil’s *instrument*. No man is *misled* without beginning straightway to *mislead*. It seems strange and hard that a man should not be content with going to destruction alone. But so it is. When a man rejects the grace of God himself, he is sure to try and keep others from receiving it. If a Jew will not have the gospel himself, he will (if he can) keep

it from being offered to a Gentile. Let us all watch carefully against such sin and cruelty. We are all poor, frail, dying creatures, placed here in a world of change and death, that we might be trained and disciplined for a happy immortality ; and we are bound to help one another in our strugglings and sufferings, —in our strife with sin, and—as far as may be—in the last close grapple with the last enemy, death. And it is a miserable thing when men and women who are all alike sinners and sufferers, and for whom alike the precious blood of Christ has been shed, do their best and utmost to keep one another out of heaven. The first great thing is to make our own salvation sure. In this one respect the religion of Jesus Christ teaches us to be selfish. We have each to bear our own burden of responsibility,—each to give for himself his own account. ‘No man can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.’ And then, as we can, by word and deed, by exhortation and example, we are bound to try and help our brethren : receiving thankfully the gospel of God’s grace, ourselves, we are bound to press it upon the acceptance of others equally needing, and equally welcome to, the unspeakable blessings which it offers.

ACTS, xxii. 23-30.

23 And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,

24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.

29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

THE excitement caused by St. Paul's mention of the Gentiles in his defence was shown by loud shouts of execration,—by some casting off their clothes, as though they were preparing to stone the apostle,—and by flinging dust into the air. The chief captain, who could not of course understand anything of the Hebrew speech which St. Paul had just delivered, naturally concluded that this must be (notwithstanding all he had heard already from the apostle) a dangerous disturber of the peace; and therefore, after the cruel manner of dealing with supposed criminals common amongst the Romans, he ordered that the apostle should be scourged, in order that thus a confession of his misdoings might be forced from him. As he was being bound for the purpose, St. Paul quietly appealed to the centurion who was directing what was done, questioning the lawfulness of scourging without trial a Roman citizen. The centurion, upon this, went and informed the chief captain as to the discovery that he had made; and the matter being inquired into, and it being clearly understood that, not by *purchase*, but in right of *birth*, St. Paul was indeed possessed of all the boasted privileges of a Roman citizen, the thongs were unloosed, and the torturers dismissed; and the chief captain, afraid of the consequences of what he had done, treated his prisoner in a very different manner. Still, however, greatly puzzled as to the exact charge brought against the apostle by the

Jews, he called together on the morrow the chief priests and all their council, and brought St. Paul from his prison, and set him before them, that he might make his defence in the chief captain's hearing.

This, then, was one of those occasions which occurred so often in the life of the apostle Paul, when, in the utmost crisis of need and danger, God's providence interfered to rescue him from death, and made use for the purpose of the instrumentality of those who had themselves no love for the gospel, no regard for the honour of Christ, no goodwill towards His servants.

When we see the advantage which it was to St. Paul to be born a Roman citizen;—how it stood him in good stead in times of danger, and saved him (as in the passage now before us) from torture and disgrace; it is most interesting to trace in the apostle's own words this idea of the value of citizenship of some great and powerful state. Writing to the Philippians, he says of himself and his fellow-labourers in the work of the ministry, in contrast to some worldly-minded and licentious teachers of whom he had spoken even weeping, 'Our *conversation* is in heaven,' or as the words really are, 'Our *citizenship* is in heaven' (Phil. iii. 20); we are free-men of Mount Zion, the city of the living God.

St. Paul had known what it was to be a citizen of Rome; he had found the worth and usefulness of

this privilege, and the thought of it seemed to run in his mind. 'We are citizens,' he would say, 'not of any earthly city however great and famous;—we are citizens of heaven. Our home is there,—our best friends are there,—our king is there; by the laws of heaven we are ruled,—of the privileges of heaven we are made partakers.' We have seen that St. Paul pleaded successfully and advantageously his Roman citizenship even when far away from Rome. Christians, too, who have not yet come to the rest and inheritance which God has provided for them can still say, 'Our citizenship is in heaven;' 'we are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,'—'a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.'

It was a great thing, as we have seen, to be a Roman citizen; it often formed a security against insult, oppression, and injustice. Does any one ask what advantage is there in being a citizen of heaven? Much every way. To have angels (who are citizens of heaven at home in heaven) as our brethren and friends,—to have the lord of angels Himself as our protector,—to have a claim to all the precious promises of the gospel,—to have God the Holy Spirit as our guide, teacher, and comforter,—to have a good hope through grace,—and the blessed prospect of coming shortly in body and soul there where even now our hearts and treasures are; such are some of the many privileges of citizens of heaven.

But if a good and loyal citizen has special *advantages* and *privileges*, he has special *duties* too. He will be jealous for the honour of the city and country with which he is connected; he will make himself well acquainted with his country's laws that he may not break them; he will feel himself tied by links of brotherly affection to his fellow-citizens whether near him or at a distance; especially will he pay all dutiful homage to his sovereign, the head of the community of which he is a member. Citizens of heaven, then, ought to be jealous for the honour of their country; they ought to make themselves well acquainted with the laws of heaven written in the Bible; they should love their fellow-citizens; they should honour their King, and be pained to hear His holy name blasphemed, and to see His laws broken. We need not be in a high position in this world in order to be citizens of heaven. We may have poor cottages, scanty fare, and hard work, but for all that we may have angels as our friends, Jesus Christ as our elder brother, and heaven for our home. And of that home it is said, 'The city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the lamb is the light thereof.' (Rev. xxi. 23.)

ACTS, xxiii. 1-5.

1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

WE have seen how, by pleading the privileges of a Roman citizen, the apostle Paul escaped the pain and degradation of scourging with a view to forcing from him a confession of his supposed crimes. After a night spent in the castle, the apostle was brought down and placed in formal trial before the council of the Jews. There, looking intently at the countenances of those who were sitting in judgment

upon him, St. Paul began by declaring that he had *'lived in all good conscience before God until that day.'* He did not mean by this that he had not made great mistakes—that he had not run himself, and led others, into terrible sin; he calls himself a 'blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious'—even 'the chief of sinners.' All that the apostle means is, that in what he had done he had followed the dictates of his conscience—he had been 'zealous towards God;' he had thought it his duty to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus Christ; he 'verily thought' that in his persecution of Christians he was 'doing God service.' His conscience was grievously misinformed, perverted, blinded, but he had obeyed its biddings. He tells us expressly that he obtained mercy because he did what he did *'ignorantly in unbelief.'*

We shall see more of what the apostle says about conscience when we come to the consideration of the next chapter. There he speaks of his careful obedience to the voice of conscience after his conversion. Here he plainly refers chiefly, if not entirely, to his life before his conversion. St. Paul differed vastly from many in this respect; he honestly and truly endeavoured to do that which he thought it his duty to do. Does this clear him of sin? Certainly not. St. Paul himself would have been the very last to plead that it did. For we must always remember that it is not enough to say that we are fol-

lowing the dictates of our conscience. A Mahommedan, a Brahmin, a Romanist, would say this. It is our plain duty to see that our consciences are rightly informed—that they are guided and regulated by God's Spirit, and God's word. We have, in these days of ours, ample means for having our consciences properly instructed and enlightened. The fault is all our own if they are dark and perverted. May God help us to seek light and to act up to it, that we may be enabled with some measure of truth to adopt the apostle's words, 'Our rejoicing is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.'

The high priest, Ananias, angry at the calm and bold demeanour of a man whom he had set down in his mind as a criminal, commanded those who stood by to smite St. Paul on the mouth. In all likelihood the command was at once most readily obeyed. When our blessed Lord, under very similar circumstances, was smitten on the cheek, his simple remonstrance addressed to the smiter was, 'If I have spoken evil bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me?' St. Paul, however, with all his love, and zeal, and holy devotedness, was but a man of like passions with ourselves; and he (like Moses of old) was provoked to 'speak unadvisedly with his lips.' 'God,' said he to Ananias, '*shall smite thee, thou whited wall : for sittest thou to judge me after*

the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?' There was, no doubt, justice in the remonstrance, but the tone in which the words were spoken breathed of impatience and anger. And St. Paul, himself, soon seemed to feel this. For, when his attention was drawn to the fact that the man whom he addressed in such severe and stinging words was God's high priest, he at once apologised for what he had done, saying, '*I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*' There have been many different explanations given of these words; perhaps the best and simplest is, to understand the apostle as meaning, 'I did not sufficiently consider—did not reflect upon his being the high priest;' as if he had said, 'Pardon, my brethren, the hastiness and anger of my speech. I did not remember to whom I was speaking. I confess my mistake. I acknowledge that the word of God forbids me to speak evil of an appointed judge and ruler, and in disobeying that prohibition I have done wrong.'

If there was in St. Paul the liability to speak rashly, and to act imprudently, which of necessity belongs to all human frailty, still we see in him a noble readiness at once to acknowledge anything said or done amiss, and to make all possible amends for it. In the midst of such an audience—so prejudiced, so bitter, so eager to condemn, many a man

would have been very reluctant to own himself in the least degree in the wrong. He would expect the utmost possible advantage to be taken of the smallest slip or failing. St. Paul, however, was not one who cared exclusively for his own honour and credit. Whatever others might think or say of him, his great aim was to glorify God; and to accomplish this he was willing to be anything or nothing; to give, if needful, a sort of triumph to his enemies by a confession of having done wrong, as well as to incur their hatred by a bold proclamation of the truth. May we have more of the apostle's lowly spirit of self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness; and, whilst careful not to give offence, be ever ready humbly to acknowledge our fault if we have heedlessly and wrongly given it.

ACTS, xxiii. 6-11.

6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

ST. PAUL, observing that in the Jewish council there were two distinct parties who differed most widely in their religious views, though now joined in hatred and opposition to himself, cried out, '*Men*

and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee : of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.'

Elsewhere we have the apostle dwelling upon the fact of his being a Pharisee. In the twenty-sixth chapter we shall find him speaking of it as a thing thoroughly well known to the Jews in general, that 'after the most straitest sect of his religion he had lived a Pharisee.' Again, in his Epistle to the Philippians, when summing up those advantages of birth and position which he had learnt to reckon loss for Christ, he speaks of himself as 'circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee.' (Phil. iii. 5.)

The announcement made in the council of St. Paul's connexion, both in his own person and in that of his father, with the Pharisees, caused great tumult. For the assembly were both Pharisees and Sadducees, and scribes who sided with one or other of the two parties, and the words of the apostle turned their thoughts away for a moment from the man who was on his defence before them, to the great matters as to which they so fiercely disagreed amongst themselves. The Sadducees were much like some amongst us in these days who deny the resurrection of the dead, and the existence of angels and spirits; materialists in fact, who believe nothing which they cannot see or touch. The Pharisees, on

the other hand, confessing the resurrection, and the reality of the unseen spiritual world, found to their surprise that in these points the man whom they were trying agreed with them.

Loud rose the strife of tongues ; some crying one thing and some another, until the voices of some scribes which were of the Pharisees' part made themselves heard amidst the uproar, exclaiming, 'We find no evil in this man ; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God ;' words which remind us strongly of those spoken in the same council about seven years before this by Gamaliel ; 'I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.' It is possible that the aged Gamaliel once again suggested to the council temperate measures, and this time on behalf of the man who once sat at his feet as one of his most promising and successful scholars. However this might be, the noise and excitement in the assembly grew more furious, and the chief captain had once again to interfere to prevent St. Paul from being torn in pieces by the contending parties. So once again Roman soldiers became the apostle's protectors, and, rescued by them from the enraged disputants, he was brought to his old cell in the castle.

After all the tumult which had surrounded him,

and the imminent danger to which he had been exposed, how encouraging must have been the vision granted to St. Paul on the following night, when *the Lord stood by him*, as before at Corinth, saying, '*Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*' Could anything be more beautifully timed than this gracious communication from the great Head of the Church? Thrice within the course of a few days had St. Paul as nearly as possible lost his life from the violence of priests, councillors, and people. He was very shortly to encounter fresh danger from the lying in wait of the Jews; and in the far distance there was a prison at Rome, and finally martyrdom. Just at such a time it was that the Lord stood by him, saying, '*Be of good cheer, Paul.*' It is possible that just now, as on the former occasion on which He appeared to His servant at Corinth, the Lord may have seen the heart of the apostle fainting under the pressure of unwonted trials and dangers. He may have known that a word of comfort was just specially needed; for He who searches the hearts always times His help according to his servants' need. So now he showed St. Paul that He recognised the testimony which he had delivered in Jerusalem as having been true and faithful, and that, let who will oppose and threaten, he should be preserved to deliver a like testimony for his Master in Rome.

It must have been an unspeakable comfort to the apostle to know that, in spite of all opposition and persecution, he was treading the very path marked out for him,—that all was turning out according to God's will and appointment, and all making for the furtherance of the gospel. Visions, such as those granted under his very exceptional circumstances to St. Paul, are not to be looked for by us; but Christ has many ways of saying to us in our need and trials, 'Be of good cheer.' Often a text of Scripture, full of power and sweetness, shines out from the sacred page as a message newly sent from heaven; or a friend is sent to cheer us; or a book exactly containing what we want falls in our way. The path of duty will always be made plain to those who are willing obediently to walk in it; and, in the storms of life as well as in the valley of the shadow of death, they who follow St. Paul as he followed Christ will surely hear the voice of One present to uphold and guide, 'Be of good cheer:—it is I, be not afraid.'

ACTS, xxiii. 12-35.

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went, and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

21 But do not thou yield unto them : for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him : and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night ;

24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

25 And he wrote a letter after this manner :

26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. -

27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them : then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council :

29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle :

33 Who, when they came to Cæsarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of

what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia ;

35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

WE saw, in the former part of this chapter, the apostle Paul pleading his cause before the Jewish council, and by his announcement of his being a Pharisee, and as such a firm believer in the resurrection of the dead, giving rise to a great disturbance in the council, which was put an end to by Claudius Lysias commanding the soldiers to go down and take him by force from amidst the contending parties, and bring him into the castle.

Once again disappointed in their hopes, the Jews now had recourse, not to law, but to a deliberately planned attempt to murder the apostle,—an attempt in which, to their shame, the chief priests and elders joined. How truly that might be said of these cruel and blood-thirsty men which our Lord said of the Jews of His time, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.' (St. John, viii. 44.)

The very day after that tumultuous scene in the council, forty Jews banded themselves together, and bound themselves under a great curse that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Their plan was to induce the chief captain

to consent to the apostle being once again brought from the castle, and placed before the council, on the pretext of making further examination into his case; then, on his way from the fortress to the council-chamber, the conspirators were to waylay and kill him. This wicked plot came to the knowledge of St. Paul's nephew, and through him first to the apostle himself, and afterwards to the chief captain. Claudius Lysias, manifestly interested in his prisoner, listened readily to the pleadings of the young man on behalf of his relative. He ordered a strong force of soldiers, consisting altogether of nearly five hundred, to be got ready, a relay of horses to be provided for St. Paul, that there might be no needless delay in the journey, and bade that all should set out at nine o'clock at night for Cæsarea. All was carried out according to orders. That night the party travelled some thirty-five miles to Antipatris. Thence the foot-soldiers returned to Jerusalem, and the horsemen escorting the apostle brought him to Cæsarea. There a letter from the chief captain, explaining what he had discovered about St. Paul, and what he had done on his behalf, was delivered to Felix, the governor; and the apostle was put into safe custody in Herod's judgment-hall, until his case could, in the presence of his accusers, be further inquired into.

When we bear in mind that the Lord had ex-

pressly declared his purpose that St. Paul should testify of Him in Rome, we cannot but be struck with the way in which that purpose was carried out. If those Jewish conspirators had accomplished their murderous design, God's own assurance to St. Paul as to the future would have fallen to the ground. But how were those cruel men defeated? In the most simple and natural manner possible. St. Paul's nephew becomes in some manner acquainted with the plot, and makes it known first to his uncle, and then to the chief captain, by whom all needful precautions are at once taken. We never hear or read of this young man before or after in the Bible story. He is used as God's instrument for a special purpose, and then disappears. Rather than that God's word should fail of accomplishment an angel would have been brought from Heaven to rescue St. Paul. But simpler means suffice. And the practical lesson which is taught us by the story is this: that many of the common events of daily life, things which we think in no way strange and unusual, are made use of by God to carry out His great designs of love and wisdom. Meetings and partings—visits from friends, or even casual acquaintances—words dropt inadvertently—books taken up, as we call it, by chance; such apparent trifles have often influenced the lives of men in this world and the next. And God has His eye ever on His faithful servants; He numbers the

very hairs of their heads, and secretly but surely works, in ways unsuspected by themselves, for their good.

If we had seen St. Paul, surrounded by soldiers, riding one weary mile after another during that night journey to Cæsarea, we should, perhaps, have been disposed to pity him as helpless and forsaken, surrounded by enemies, and exposed in every way to danger and distress. But the faithful apostle had other attendants besides those rough horsemen and spearmen. ‘The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.’ No doubt, the hosts of God, present though unseen, hovered around the Lord’s prisoner all through that long, dark night. No doubt, heavenly comforts cheered his soul. ‘Happy (even though bound and persecuted) is the man that is in such a case; yea, happy is he whose God is the Lord.’

ACTS, xxiv. 1-15.

1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes :

6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple : whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee : by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

10 Then Paul after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast

been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself :

11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

12-And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city :

13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets :

15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

THE high priest Ananias, and the elders of the Jews, disappointed once more in their wicked and cruel designs, but still restless in malice, in five days' time followed St. Paul down to Cæsarea, taking with them a hired advocate of the name of Tertullus, who might bring in the most formal way an accusation against St. Paul. This man began his speech with the most fulsome flattery, extolling Felix, who was an unjust ruler, and a man of profligate life, as a pattern of all that was virtuous and upright. He then went on to accuse the apostle of being a mover of sedition wherever he went, a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, a sacrilegious profaner of the Temple, '*a pestilent fellow,*' indeed, whom it was the duty and interest of both Jews and Gentiles to get rid of.

St. Paul commenced his defence by referring with satisfaction to the length of time during which Felix had been a governor amongst the Jews (about six years), and his consequent acquaintance with the peculiar rites and customs of that nation. He then went on to clear himself of the different charges brought against him. Entirely denying that he had stirred up sedition, or profaned the Temple, the apostle continued : ‘ *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.*’ St. Paul had just been charged with being ‘ *a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.*’ ‘Well,’ says the apostle, ‘I do not altogether deny that ; at least, *this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers.* They, indeed, speak contemptuously of Jesus of Nazareth as a deceiver ; I own Him as my Lord, Master, and King. And in thus acknowledging Him, I am only acting in obedience to those very Scriptures which my accusers profess to reverence. I believe firmly all things which are written in the law and the prophets ; and I see those things accomplished and explained in Jesus of Nazareth. Mine is no new religion ; I worship the God of my fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.’

‘ *After the way which they call heresy.*’ St. Paul

cared as little for hard words as he did for hard blows. But it is marvellous how frightened professing Christians of these days often are at a scoff, a sneer, a word of ridicule and reproach in matters which have to do with their souls' salvation. Suppose any one to become anxious about his soul, and to show his anxiety by a more careful use of the means of grace; of course there will always be those who are ready to laugh and sneer, and call him a 'fool,' or a 'hypocrite.' And if it be so, it is not uncommon for a man to look ashamed as though he had been caught in some mean, unmanly action, to shut up his Bible, get up from his knees, and set about excusing himself and endeavouring to prove that he *is* not, and *does not want* to be different from his neighbours. This is not like St. Paul. Would it not be far wiser and more manly to say at once, 'This I confess to you, that after the way which you call folly and hypocrisy, I worship the God of my fathers; I confess to you that I am not afraid of *you*, but I am exceedingly afraid of *the wrath to come*;—I confess that I *do* consider my soul worth thinking about and caring for,—that I *do* regard Jesus Christ as well worthy of my trust, love, and obedience, and heaven as well worth striving for.'

'*And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*' St. Paul refers to the resurrection of the dead as being an article of faith

with those very men who accused him. The Pharisees stoutly maintained this great doctrine; and yet, holding and professing this belief, they plotted St. Paul's assassination, set at nought every principle of truth and justice, hated the Gospel, and rejected the Saviour. It is one thing to repeat a sound creed, and quite another to be strongly influenced by the truths repeated. 'I,' said St. Paul, '*have hope toward God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead.*' *Hoping* for a resurrection; we know well that this was the state of the apostle's feelings with respect to it, from many allusions to it in his writings. But is it every one who could, like St. Paul, with sincerity and truth, speak of *hoping* for a resurrection? Are there not many who, if they spoke honestly what they felt, would say, 'I am very much afraid there will be a resurrection of the dead; I wish with all my heart it were otherwise; but the Bible is too plain for me; instances of men and women having been raised from the dead already, satisfy me that the dead *can* be raised; words that I cannot explain away assure me that they *will*: yes — there will be a resurrection; but oh that I could escape it! that I might have nothing to do with it!' Very different indeed from such feelings about the resurrection was St. Paul's happy confidence in respect to it. He hoped and longed for it, as a day of joy, and liberty, and glory. No man can truly *hope* for a resurrection but he who has reason to

believe that it will bring him life and happiness ; and no man can expect such things but he who rests upon the promises and the love of Jesus,—trusts in His atoning sacrifice, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit seeks to walk in newness of life. St. Paul, as we see, speaks of a resurrection of the ‘ un-just,’ as well as the ‘ just.’ Our Lord also speaks of a ‘ resurrection of damnation ’ as well as a ‘ resurrection of life.’ If a man dies in his sins he must rise again in his sins, and have those sins like a mill-stone upon him when he stands before the bar of Christ. Very quickly, though quietly, are the great things of which the Bible speaks coming on. Soon, very soon, the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed,—the judgment shall be set, and the books opened. God of His mercy grant that we may live a truly Christian life, so that we may die a hopeful death, and be partakers of a glorious resurrection !

ACTS, xxiv. 16.

16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

WE have seen with what comfortable hope the apostle Paul could look forward to and speak of the resurrection of the dead. We cannot wonder at this, when we have before us the account which in all truth and sincerity he was enabled to give of his daily life and conversation. The plain meaning of his words seems to be this, 'It is my constant study and endeavour,—the business of my life,—the object of my hopes and efforts, to act in such a way that my conscience may not condemn me in matters which have to do either with God or man.' Elsewhere, as we have seen before, he says, 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.' (2 Cor. i. 12.) Conscience is God's witness in a man's own breast. There have been many definitions given of conscience; and it is not easy to say in simple language

what it is. Neither is it at all necessary. Every one of us knows well enough for all practical purposes, how conscience acts in his own case. Is there one of us who does not know whether he is doing right or wrong? Is there one who hears no voice within reproving him when he has gone astray, and commending him when he has done right?

Only there is this to be carefully observed: if a man resists his conscience, and, when the voice within seems to whisper, 'This is the way, walk thou in it,' persists in going in an opposite direction, conscience soon withdraws and withholds its warnings, and sinks down baffled into silence. Hence it is that we read in the Bible of a conscience 'darkened,' 'defiled,' 'seared as with a hot iron.' In such cases, conscience disobeyed, defeated, and perverted, lies deep down in a man's bosom, waiting for its opportunity to condemn where it has not been allowed to guide. And then often just at the last,—just when it is too late, and when no place for repentance is left, conscience wakes up; shows a man what he *might* have been in contrast with what he *is*,—arrays before him lost opportunities, wasted time, slighted warnings, misused talents, Sundays profaned and the Bible unread, a life frittered away in self-pleasing, carelessness, and sin; and sends the poor creature, tortured with doubt and despair, into a dark and dreadful eternity.

St. Paul says, *I exercise myself to have always a*

conscience void of offence. I take pains about the matter, I am watchful about it, I am careful so to hearken to the voice of conscience, that it may not convict me of sin, whether as regards my duty towards God, or my duty towards my neighbour.' Is it not the fact with too many of us our lives are, more or less, a kind of fight with conscience? Let us take any one day or week, and can we not see, on looking back at it, that we have done many things which conscience warned us against as sinful, and left undone others that conscience pointed out as duties? 'A conscience void of offence,' must indeed be a blessed thing. Not that even St. Paul quite reached this; he 'exercised himself' to have it, strove after it, aimed at it. But he says himself that he had not altogether attained to the perfection which yet he laboured after. He as well as his brother apostle, St. John, would be most ready to acknowledge, 'If we say we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' But he followed after, however, that which yet he could not fully reach. 'Happy,' says St. Paul, writing to the Roman Christians, 'is he that condemneth not himself in the thing that he alloweth.' Happy, that is, is he who is not when called to account by conscience, obliged to own himself guilty of doing what he knew at the time he did it, to be sin; and if we cannot have that full happiness at all times, there is, blessed be God, in the Gospel of Christ, provision

made for having 'our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.' There is a fountain opened for sin and all uncleanness, in the precious blood of Christ—that blood of sprinkling which washes out crimson stains of sin. Jesus died for us that He might 'purge our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God.' Let us take thankfully all the peace and comfort to be found in the promises of the Gospel, and its rich provision for all our need; and then, constrained by every motive of love and thankfulness, of self-distrust and godly fear, follow, with Divine help, St. Paul in his daily endeavour to have always a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man.

ACTS, xxiv. 17-27.

17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation and offerings.

18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and to object, if they had ought against me.

20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council.

21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of

Paul, that he might loose him : wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix, room : and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

IN St. Paul's defence of himself before the Roman governor Felix at Cæsarea, after protesting his innocence as to the accusations brought against him, and giving some account of his own faith, life, and hopes, the apostle went on to explain what it was that had brought him at that particular time to Jerusalem, that is, to bring alms to his nation, and offerings. He declared that, when there, he had carefully complied with the requirements of the Jewish law, without in any way profaning the temple, or giving occasion for any disturbance ; and that the only thing that any one could possibly take exception against was a saying of his before the Council : 'Touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question by you this day.' Felix, having from his experience amongst them a better understanding of the prejudices of the Jews, and their hatred to the Christian religion, than most men in his position would have had, postponed the consideration of the matter until Claudius Lysias could himself appear to tell all he knew about it. Meanwhile he entrusted St. Paul to the care of a centurion, with a charge that he should have a considerable amount of freedom, and be allowed to see and

receive kindnesses from any of his friends. And then after some little time, whether influenced by curiosity, or some even meaner motive, Felix sent for St. Paul, and questioned him 'concerning his faith in Christ. *And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*' To enter rightly into the true character of this interview between the prisoner and his judge, it may be well to refer to what, from ancient history, we know of Felix. He was originally a slave, brother of a man who was a great favourite with the Emperor Claudius, and chiefly through that brother's instrumentality raised to a position of authority. Felix was a cruel and unjust governor, a man of profligate life, living at that very time in sin with Drusilla, whom he had tempted away from her lawful husband. On one occasion, we are told, he brought about the murder of a high-priest, named Jonathan, who had ventured to reprove his injustice. In two years after his first meeting with St. Paul he was recalled to Rome, and accused of many acts of extortion and misgovernment, for which he only escaped punishment through the intercession of his brother. Such was the man before whom St. Paul not only pleaded his cause, but also reasoned 'concerning the faith in Christ.' Whatever Felix was, he had, of course, from his position and office, great power; the

temptation, therefore, must have been strong for the apostle to court his favour by sparing his sins. St. Paul however, was not the man to speak smooth things to any sinner. He went therefore, straight to the mark, and reasoned with his judge as to those very sins of which he was guilty, reminding him of that great bar of judgment at which he would himself have to give account.

He *reasoned of righteousness*. The word here means the just, upright, honest fulfilment of duty, in whatever position of life a man may be placed. We can easily understand how such reasoning would touch one like Felix, who was continually setting at nought all principles of justice and honour, to the quick. It was a bold thing to reason with such a man of righteousness, when the reprover was a prisoner, and the guilty man his judge.

Next St. Paul *reasoned of temperance*. To this man of loose and profligate life he spoke of the duty of self-restraint and self-denial; warning him that sins such as he was even then guilty of must be his ruin; that to live after the flesh was to die; that sowing to the flesh he must of the flesh reap corruption, and be everlastingly shut out of the abode of the pure and holy.

And then the apostle enforced all his reasonings by a reference to the *judgment to come*; reminding the Roman governor of the account which he must render of the things done in the body at the bar of

Christ,—of the sentence that would then be passed by one to whom all the secrets of his heart and life had been perfectly known, and by whom his eternal portion would be fixed.

It was not at all to be wondered at, that, when such as these were the subjects of discourse, and St. Paul was the preacher, '*Felix trembled.*' The voice of the reprover without woke up the witness for God in the man's own bosom; conscience pleaded guilty to every charge; and the careless sinner had a slight foretaste of the terror which shall overwhelm the impenitent when they stand at last before the judgment-seat.

But though Felix *trembled*, he went no further; he did not ask St. Paul to pray for him; he did not pray for himself; he did not give up his sins, or plead for pardon, and enter upon a new course of life. Alarmed, and troubled, the wretched man cut short the interview with the apostle by saying, '*Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.*' Did that 'convenient season' ever come? We are told that often after this Felix sent for St. Paul; but we hear nothing of his ever again 'trembling' under the preaching of the Gospel. On the contrary, all history testifies that after this Felix pursued his old course of injustice and sin. His future interviews with St. Paul were sought, not to learn the way to heaven, but from the base, sordid hope of being bribed to release him. And then,

when for his misdoings he was deprived of his office, and called to Rome, he left St. Paul bound, though convinced of his innocence, simply to be popular with those whom he had misgoverned, and so offended. The man had his time of softening and trembling ; the Spirit strove with him ; the very depths of his heart were stirred ; but he silenced his reprover and kept his sins, and soon he was able to hear without emotion, without shame for the past, or hope for the future.

There are many in these days who like Felix tremble under the sound of the Gospel. They feel they are not safe, not ready to die, not preparing for heaven. But like the Roman governor they put off to some future '*convenient season*' the great business of turning to God, and securing the salvation of their souls. Such as these are the '*convenient seasons*' on which men confidently reckon,—a time of sickness,—old age,—a time of greater prosperity, and therefore of greater leisure,—days when in the natural course of things their tempers will be more softened and their passions subdued, or some change of circumstances may incline and enable them better to think of and prepare for another world. Now the great danger of all this putting off lies in this ; it is not only that the convenient seasons reckoned upon may never come,—not only that if they do come, *a time of sickness*, when bodily suffering and weakness absorb attention, is the *worst* and

not the *best* time for turning to God, and *old age*, when mind and memory are failing, the least suitable time for beginning to give attention to the most important things that a man can think about,—not only that altered circumstances do not in any way whatever ensure an altered state of mind,—but that, as we see in the history of Felix, convictions stifled may never return, conscience resisted may cease to warn, and the Holy Spirit may cease to strive. And so it may (and does in a thousand instances) come to pass, that when the convenient season counted upon has arrived, the man who counted upon it neither feels, nor fears, nor hopes, nor prays; he has become ‘past feeling,’ and goes on in darkness, unconscious that he has a lie in his right hand. Everything then, seems to warn us that there *is*, there *can* be, no season so *convenient*, and certainly none so *safe*, as the present for turning to God. ‘*Now* is the accepted time; *to-day* the day of salvation.’ And we should carefully cherish and make the most of every moment of softened feeling, every stirring of conscience, every longing after better things. When we feel drawn to pray we should at once pray, or to read the Bible we should at once take it up. Satan will most readily allow us to give *to-morrow* to God, if we will but give him *to-day*. May the wise resolution of the Psalmist be at all times ours, ‘I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments.’

ACTS, xxv. 1-27.

1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem.

2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar have I offended any thing at all.

9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

10 Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die : but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar.

12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.

13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus.

14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix :

15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.

16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed :

19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar.

22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man himself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Ber-

nice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa; that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

FELIX, in utter disregard of all principles of justice, had left St. Paul a prisoner at Cæsarea, when he was compelled to give up his office as governor. His successor, Festus, a man of more honourable character, on going up from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, was beset by the high priest and elders of the Jews, requesting that the apostle might be brought up from Cæsarea to Jerusalem to be tried; their plan being (as before) to kill him on the way. Festus probably suspected their wicked designs; at any rate he would not comply with them, but said that on his return to Cæsarea he would have the apostle tried there before him, and that then they might bring such accusations as they could against him. The trial accordingly took place; charges and ac-

250 *St. Paul's Innocence acknowledged.*

cusations were made, but none of them could be proved; and in the face of them all, St. Paul with all confidence was enabled to affirm, '*Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended anything at all.*'

From the twenty-first chapter of this book to the end we see St. Paul in custody; we see him sent from city to city, from court to court, and having to answer for himself before one judge after another. And one thing that strikes us throughout the whole story is, how from all quarters evidence was given as to the apostle's innocence of the charges brought against him. Thus in the stormy meeting of the Jewish council recorded in the twenty-third chapter, we have the scribes which were of the Pharisees' part saying, '*We find no evil in this man.*'

The chief captain, Claudius Lysias, writes to Felix, concerning St. Paul, that he had '*nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.*' Festus says, that the apostle's accusers had brought against him none accusations of such things as he supposed; and that he found that St. Paul '*had committed nothing worthy of death.*' Finally, both Festus and Agrippa agree in saying, '*This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.*' Thus from the mouths of those who had no love for the Gospel and its preachers came the clearest, strongest testimony as to the entire innocence of the apostle. In like manner, in the case of his Divine Master,

both Herod and Pontius Pilate were forced to acknowledge, 'We find in him no fault at all.' God can defend the characters of His servants as well as their persons. In St. Paul's history, as well as in that of thousands more, we see a fulfilment of the words of the Psalmist, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.' (Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6.)

St. Paul, wearied with so many harassing and fruitless trials, guided also, we cannot doubt, by God's purpose made known to him that he should testify for Christ in Rome, appealed to the Roman Emperor himself, to whom Festus at once resolved to send him. God had much people in Rome; and much work for the apostle to do there; and this was the way in which He would have him brought thither. As St. Paul's appeal to Cæsar was evidently according to God's will, and the means through which His purposes were accomplished, we seem justified in coming to the conclusion that Christians may, with a good conscience, have recourse to the ordinary courts of justice in defence of life, property, or character. St. Paul's appeal to Cæsar did not, in any way, imply a want of confidence in God.

It was just when Festus had determined to send St. Paul to Rome to be judged by the Emperor, that King Herod Agrippa, a son of the man whose

awful death is recorded in the twelfth chapter, came with his sister Bernice on a visit of courtesy to Festus. This seemed a good opportunity for the governor, who was sorely puzzled by St. Paul's case, to secure the assistance of Agrippa in examining the apostle, so that together they might decide in what terms his crimes (if indeed he were guilty) should be reported at Rome.

Accordingly, with a great deal of pomp and state, Agrippa and Bernice, with Festus and a large gathering of the chief captains and principal men of the city, met in the public judgment hall to hear what St. Paul had to say in his defence. The spirit in which some at least of them listened is shown by these words of Festus, when introducing the matter to Agrippa, '*They*' (that is St. Paul's accusers) *had brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*' In such careless, scornful language did this Roman dare to speak of Him who will one day be his Judge. Yet in the meeting of the great apostle with him and his companions, God was dealing graciously with their hearts; the Gospel was brought to bear directly upon them; they saw and heard what Divine grace had done for another, and could do for them. And if they were thus left without excuse, how much greater must be our guilt if, in the full blaze of Gospel light, we think un-

worthily of the Saviour, and neglect His great salvation!

‘*One Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive;*’ it is not indeed in language such as this that any of us would think of speaking about Christ. But may our hearts echo and deeply feel truths which our lips utter; and may it be with souls bowed in deep and lowly adoration that we hear the Saviour saying, ‘I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death!’ (Rev. i. 18.)

ACTS, xxvi. 1-18.

1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself :

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews :

3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews : wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews ;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers :

7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ?

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem : and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from

the chief priests ; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet : for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee :

17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee,

18 To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

ST. PAUL, permitted to speak for himself before Festus and Agrippa, began by a courteous recognition of Agrippa's acquaintance with the customs of the Jewish nation, and therefore of his fitness to judge of a case such as his. And then the apostle went on to give once again an account of his early life and marvellous conversion. When we observe

that the Holy Ghost caused three different narratives of that wonderful event to be recorded, do we not see at once of what vast interest and importance to the Church and the world it must be? The story would have not been so minutely told three times in one book, if there had not been special lessons of warning, instruction, and encouragement, to be drawn from it.

After referring to his early life, and strict adherence to the Jewish religion as a Pharisee, St. Paul once again draws attention to the fact, that in preaching the resurrection of the dead he was bringing forward no new doctrine; for that 'the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers,' was simply that hope of a blessed resurrection which from the very first was cherished by the faithful, and now entered into the prayers and aspirations of all true Israelites throughout the world. And '*why,*' he asks, '*should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?*' Is it harder to rebuild than to build? Is it a greater thing to recombine that which has been dissolved and scattered than to frame at first out of nothing? He who *made* man out of the dust of the earth, can surely with perfect ease *re-make* him when he has been turned for awhile to dust again. That which God's power makes perfectly *credible*, God's word makes perfectly *certain*; and each of us (let us often try to realise it) shall in our risen flesh see God.

In no other place than in this chapter, does St. Paul speak in so strong terms of his course of vehement persecution of Christ's disciples. '*Many of the saints did I shut up in prison; . . . and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*' How transparent must have been the truth and honesty of the man who in sorrow and shame spoke thus of days of ignorance and error! and how mighty must have been the transforming power which reversed entirely a life such as his, and made him the exact opposite of what he had been!

We know from the former accounts of St. Paul's conversion that, in answer to the inquiry of the terrified man struck down by the blinding glory, '*Who art thou, Lord?*' the answer came, '*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*' But from this third account we learn that the Lord added more than this. Other words, distinguishable by Saul alone, his companions hearing a sound only (it may be like distant thunder), but catching no language, reached the ears, and pierced the heart of the yet prostrate persecutor; '*Rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now*

I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.' What a full and blessed commission was this which was given under circumstances so deeply impressive to the apostle! Every word of it must have been graven upon his heart. He saw the speaker, as far as the dazzling glory would allow; he heard every word spoken by His voice.

We cannot, of course, think that the commission given to St. Paul was in substance different from that given in these days to Christ's ministers. It is not only of Gentile heathens, but of all men in their unrenewed state that it may be said that they are in a condition of blindness, darkness, and degrading bondage. God alone gives sight, light, and liberty; but His ministers, as instruments, may be spoken of as 'opening blind eyes, and turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.'

A blind man stumbles, falls, swerves from the right path, mistakes objects, and knows not whither he goeth. So a man who is spiritually blind mistakes the relative importance of earthly and heavenly things; judges wrongly about sin and holiness; sees nothing in the cross of Calvary to attract him; nothing in Jesus who hung thereon to draw forth his love. But when the Gospel comes

to him with power all is changed. Everything looks to him different. Sin and holiness, time and eternity, heaven and hell, Christ and the world, are seen in a new and altered light. Brought out of darkness into marvellous light he can now see things unseen before, and, following Christ, the light of the world, can find the way to heaven. And when the eyes of the mind are opened and light flows in, and the poor sinner discovers for the first time his own vileness, his many and aggravated transgressions, the Gospel does not come to him saying, 'Toil, strive, weep, load thyself with penances and self-mortifications, if perhaps thou mayest win a hope of pardon.' No; rather it brings God's gracious message, 'I have blotted out as a cloud thy transgressions, and as a thick cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.' Nor is 'forgiveness of sins' all. There are other blessings yet in store. *'That they may receive inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me.'* Here is the crown and consummation of all God's work of enlightening, liberating, pardoning, sanctifying. Whom He justifies He also glorifies. He raiseth the poor out of the dust, to set him among princes; He lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill to make him inherit the throne of glory. He draws forth the sinner from the dark pit and miry clay of sin, and not only washes and cleanses him, but exalts him to a portion of glory

and blessedness beyond what thought can conceive. We, thank God, have the Gospel preached to us; may we not receive the grace of God in vain, but walk in its blessed light and glorious liberty, until we come to the inheritance of the saints in light above!

ACTS, xxvi. 19-23.

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision :

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.


22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.

23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

WE have seen what was the commission given to St. Paul by the Lord Jesus, as, overwhelmed by the sight of Divine glory, the startled persecutor lay prostrate on the ground. Now, says the apostle, '*I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.*' No sooner did St. Paul cease to be a *persecutor* than at once he became a *preacher* of the faith. The very place where he came to hunt, and imprison, and drag to

death God's saints—Damascus—was the first place in which he began that work which he carried on to the day of his death, that is, preaching Christ and Him crucified. First to Jews, and then to Gentiles, the apostle delivered his message, calling to repentance, and such an altered life as should prove it sincere.

‘Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great.’ No man was ever more severely tried than St. Paul. At one time, ‘pressed out of measure, above strength, so that he despaired even of life;’ at another, ‘troubled on every side, fightings without, and fears within;’ obliged sometimes to labour for his own bread whilst preaching the Gospel of Christ; called upon to defend himself against malicious accusers, and yet to comfort those less tried than himself; imprisoned, beaten, stoned, and yet bearing all the while a burden of anxious care as to the churches which he had planted; what a life of toil and conflict was his! Nor can we doubt that the apostle spoke his own experience when he told of wrestling ‘not with flesh and blood,’ but with ‘principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places.’ Still, notwithstanding all difficulties and dangers, St. Paul held on his way; ‘*I continue*, (or “hold my ground,” as the word rather means,) *unto this day.*’ To what did the apostle owe his



stability, his perseverance, his success? Not to his own strength of mind, soundness of judgment, and firmness of purpose. 'By the grace of God,' he says, 'I am what I am;' and if 'I laboured more abundantly' than all my companions, it was 'not I, but the grace of God that was with me.' '*Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day.*' The grace and help which kept an apostle stedfast, supporting him in trial, and guiding him in difficulty, are needed by, and offered to, the humblest Christian. 'Without me,' said Christ to His disciples, 'ye can do nothing.' No, indeed; but says St. Paul, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.' *Without* Divine help even an apostle is weaker than a bruised reed; *with* it a child may be wise and strong. And what then was the great theme of St. Paul's testimony? We saw already, in considering some of the discourses of the first preachers of the Gospel, that they invariably turned to Moses and the prophets, and taking their texts from those old inspired writings showed how type, promise, and prophecy, were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. There was in St. Paul's preaching no continual straining after novelty, no 'enticing words of man's wisdom.' Christ suffering,—Christ the first-fruits of the resurrection,—Christ interceding,—Christ coming again in glory,—Christ a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel;

this was the great and exhaustless subject of the apostle's teaching. He says of himself when writing to the Corinthians, 'I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' It might seem as if the apostle were always harping on one string, — telling over and over again the same story. But let us remember there is in Christ an inexhaustible fulness which exceeds all powers of speech and thought. He is the sinner's hope, the believer's portion; the satisfier of the law, the sum and substance of the Gospel; 'made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.' His excellencies can only be set forth by a multitude of titles and figures in themselves seemingly inconsistent; for He is both the Priest and the Sacrifice; both the Door of the sheep-fold and the Shepherd; both the forerunner in the heavenly race, and the Judge at the end; both the Prince of life, and the 'man of sorrows,' who became 'obedient unto death.'

And no minister of the Gospel can be at a loss for something fresh and forcible to say, whilst he can dwell upon Christ's power, and pity, and preciousness; His willingness to save the outcast, and bless the wretched; the efficacy of His intercession, the completeness of His righteousness, the easiness of His yoke, the sweetness of His service, the faithfulness of His promises, the perfectness of His example, the richness of His reward.

‘*Testifying to small and great,*’ to young and old, to rich and poor. None are too poor, too mean, too young, to be excluded from those for whom Jesus died. Little lambs, and feeble, sickly sheep, were objects of the Chief Shepherd’s care ; and his under shepherds must not slight them. None again can be too wise or wealthy to need a Saviour. By *all* He is needed, and to *all* He is offered.

‘*Saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.*’ As though the apostle had said, ‘It is no new doctrine which I bring ; I simply declare that to *have* happened which the Old Testament Scriptures said *should* happen ; they tell of a Messiah *to come*, I of a Messiah who *has come* ; they point to a sacrifice *predicted*, I to a sacrifice *offered* ; they whisper of a victory over death *to be achieved*, I show the opened tomb, and say, the ‘Lord is risen indeed.’

Yes, Genesis opens with a promise of Christ’s first coming, and the book of Revelation closes with a promise of His second coming. The Gospel according to Moses, finds its explanation and expansion in the Gospel according to John. May we see Christ in all, and love Him *above* all ; and know Him as our hope and refuge here, and our glorious portion through all eternity !

ACTS, xxvi. 24, 25.

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

As St. Paul was speaking plainly and earnestly of the marvellous change wrought in him, and the solemn commission given to him by the Lord who appeared to him, he was rudely interrupted by Festus, who, with a loud voice called out, '*Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.*' We have here incidentally a plain recognition of the fact that St. Paul was a learned and well-educated man. We know that for the most part it was quite otherwise with the first preachers of the Gospel. In the fourth chapter of this book we read of the high-priest, rulers, and elders of the Jews, marvelling at the boldness of Peter and John, when they 'perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men.' As a rule, God 'chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;' and this, that the excellency of the power might be seen to be of God and not of

man. But St. Paul was an exception to this general rule. We see in his writings and history proofs of a mind largely stored with learning, both sacred and secular. And all this reminds us that God is no respecter of persons ; that He makes use of all kinds of instruments ; that none are shut out from His service because the talents entrusted to them are few or many ; that He can employ, and in employing exalt and dignify, the lowest, and at the same time find exercise for the noblest, loftiest powers, and teach one wise and learned as St. Paul to count all things but dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

'Paul, thou art beside thyself.' We may remember how words much like these were used of the apostle's Master. When a very great multitude, attracted by our Saviour's miracles and teaching, thronged around Him and His disciples, 'so that they could not so much as eat bread, His friends went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside himself.' (Mark, iii. 21.) And there have been, and always will be, those who to a certain extent imitate Festus in their way of thinking and speaking of true and earnest Christians. If they do not call them '*mad*,' yet they speak scornfully and contemptuously of them as '*enthusiasts*,' '*fanatics*,' people '*whose religion has taken away their common sense*,' '*not fit for the cares and businesses of the common round of daily life*.' And the strange

thing about those who talk thus is, that the opinions and practices which they scoff at and condemn, are nothing at all but the very doctrines which they themselves profess to hold, carried out into action. It was not so much to be wondered at that a heathen, such as Festus, should call an earnest preacher of the Gospel like St. Paul, 'mad.' But is it not strange and sad inconsistency for professing Christians, who kneel down in prayer to an unseen God, pleading for acceptance in the name of Christ; who give thanks for the redemption wrought by Jesus, and from time to time ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit, to count those foolish, and all but 'mad,' who make a reality of such great truths, and pray, and hope, and live accordingly? Is not he rather the madman who speaks one thing and acts as if he believed quite another? Is it mad for one who knows that eternity is coming to busy himself in preparing for it? Is it mad for a man who says that Christ died for him, to take all pains to honour and confess Him? Are not those rather to be called mad who know they must die, and yet are willing to take their chance as to what death brings to them; who know they may never see to-morrow, and yet leave the whole business of their salvation to be attended to in hours that they may never see; who know that Christ has said in plain strong words, 'He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of

God,' and yet try to wring out of such words the meaning, 'Any one may believe or not as he pleases ; God is good and merciful ; He will not be hard upon His poor creatures ; we shall not surely die ?'

St. Paul answered the scoffing Festus in words calm, grave, and temperate. '*I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*' If, on one occasion, as we saw in the twenty-third chapter, the apostle may be thought to have spoken unadvisedly with his lips, now at least he showed how well he had learnt to rule his spirit and bridle his tongue. And if St. Paul who spoke and wrote so many plain and strong things about the need of thorough renewal of the mind—about the danger of living after the flesh,—about the account to be rendered at the bar of Christ,—about the wretched condition of the man who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, and has not His Spirit ; if he who wrote and spoke thus could call his words those of '*truth and soberness,*' how can those be found fault with who following him, though at a very great distance, call men to decision, earnestness, faith, and love ? Our blessed Lord, in His parable of the Prodigal Son, represents the poor wanderer as 'coming to himself' when, thinking of his own utter folly, and the blessings of his father's house, he resolved to return. He had been out of his right mind, 'beside himself,' before. When he came to his senses he repented, and turned back to his forsaken home.

It is mad to wander heedlessly and recklessly on to destruction ; mad to contradict God and ‘make him a liar ;’ mad to call Christ, Lord, Lord, and not attempt to do the things which He says ; mad to leave the great question as to whether we are saved or lost all unsettled, and our future portion wrapped up in doubt and darkness. On the other hand it is sober sense and true wisdom to take God’s word for our guide, God’s promises as the ground of our hopes, and God’s kingdom as that which we seek and strive after. How soon will the light of a great eternity show who were mad and who were sober, who wise and who unwise ! Then shall those who have been truly ‘wise (wise unto salvation) shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they (that like St. Paul) turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.’ (Daniel, xii. 3.)

ACTS, xxvi. 26-32.

26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.

ST. PAUL had been rudely interrupted by Festus, who charged him with being mad, and had in calm and temperate language denied the charge. The apostle then turned to Agrippa, and appealed to his knowledge of the truth of what he had been relating. The amazing change wrought in such a man as Saul

of Tarsus, who from being a persecutor of the faith of Christ became a zealous preacher of it, was well and widely known; '*this thing was not done in a corner*;' it was no secret. And then St. Paul went on to address Agrippa as a Jew; as one therefore who professed to believe the prophets, and could by examining them easily test the truthfulness of the doctrines which he preached.

'*Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*' These words are very commonly regarded as expressing the feelings of a man who was so deeply impressed by what he heard that he had nearly made up his mind to cast aside all prejudices, to give up his cherished sins, and become, like St. Paul, a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. And, thus understood, they teach us useful lessons as to the danger of mere convictions which stop short of conversion; the uselessness of being mere stony-ground hearers; and the vast importance of using the day of grace before the night comes to end it, and deciding promptly and heartily to be the Lord's. But the words do not really bear this meaning. They are not the words of a man almost convinced, but of a cold and heartless scoffer. The real meaning of the words as they stand in the original is this; '*You would have me then to be a Christian all at once.*' There is evidently an allusion to the suddenness of the conversion which St. Paul had just been describing. As though he had said, '*You have*

described your own conversion to Christianity. It was rapid and sudden. This may be all very well for you, a common Jew, but for one like myself, of royal estate and dignity, such a sudden change would be most unsuitable and unseemly. I must have time to think about such a matter as this. To expect me to change my course of life all in a moment is unreasonable and absurd.'

St. Paul's reply would then run thus, 'I would to God that whether in a short time or a long,—whether suddenly or gradually, thou and all that hear me were such as I am; partakers of my faith, my hopes, my joy; altogether indeed like me, except in my bonds and sufferings for the Gospel's sake.'

Are there not many who when urged to give their hearts at once to God imitate the careless and scoffing Agrippa? They will plead for more delay; 'Oh, not so soon, not so quickly, not just yet. I must enjoy the world and sin a little longer. When I have got rid of such and such difficulties; when I have consulted such and such a friend. I know there is One who stands knocking at the door of my heart; but to open at once is inconvenient and unnecessary. Sudden changes do not suit me; let me wait and make up my mind at leisure.' Thus it is that thousands, warned, entreated, and perhaps for the moment moved, lose for ever offered blessings, and sink down to shame and woe.

Of Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, we should have

heard and known little or nothing had they not been mixed up with St. Paul's history, and their names thus recorded in the lasting pages of God's holy book. The first of the three put off the consideration of eternal things to 'a convenient season' which never came; the second called earnestness and zeal 'madness;' the third scoffed at the idea of a sudden change of heart and life, kept his sins, and died as he had lived, without God and without hope. A very great privilege was granted to these men in being brought into contact with St. Paul, and listening to his inspired pleading; and very great responsibility in consequence rested upon them. But they leave each a sad and solemn lesson for us, and themselves pass away into darkness. And those words which we read in the Apocrypha, though not a part of God's own word, strikingly express the feelings of these men when once again they shall meet their former prisoner at the bar of Christ; 'This was he, whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach: we fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour: how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints. Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us; * * * but the righteous live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the most High. Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom,

and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand.' (Wisdom, v. 3, 4, 5, 6, 15.)

It would seem as though St. Paul's earnest, though most courteous, reply to Agrippa's scoffing words were as much as he could at this time bear. The matter was becoming too serious, too personal. So the assembly was broken up; both Festus and Agrippa agreeing in their opinion that the man who had been on trial before them was wholly innocent, and therefore might have been liberated if he had not appealed unto Cæsar. We know that it was the Lord's will and purpose that St. Paul should testify of Him in Rome. All then was right; the continued captivity, and the appeal to Cæsar. A hand unseen was directing all. Hither and thither the Gospel and its faithful preacher were being sent, and God was glorified in His servant (according to his own earnest wish and prayer) both in his life and in his death.

ACTS, xxvii. 1-20.

1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

3 And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.

7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone;

8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The Fair Havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,

10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south-west and north-west.

13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:

17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands strake sail, and so were driven.

18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;

19 And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

THE chapter of which we have now read a part, may be called specially a sailor's chapter. Never was there an account of a shipwreck written more deeply interesting, and certainly never one so

instructive.* The vessel in which St. Paul (with some other State prisoners) left the harbour of Cæsarea, on his way to Rome, was a ship of Adramyttium, engaged probably in the coasting trade, and at that time bound on her homeward voyage. The plan was to coast along the shores of Asia Minor, until some port was reached where they might expect to find an Alexandrian corn-ship bound for Italy.

St. Paul had as his companions St. Luke, to whom, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are indebted for the beautiful story before us, and Aristarchus, mentioned in the nineteenth chapter as one of St. Paul's 'companions in travel,' in the apostle's Epistle to the Colossians as his 'fellow-prisoner,' and in that to Philemon as his 'fellow-labourer.'

The day after the voyage began the ship touched at Sidon. He who gave Joseph favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison in Egypt into which he was unjustly cast, gave St. Paul such favour in the eyes of the centurion charged with his custody, that

* It has been in the hope of awakening fresh interest in the narrative in those who 'go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters,' that I have (with the valuable assistance of *Conybeare and Howson's Life of St. Paul*) dwelt somewhat fully on the details of St. Paul's shipwreck. Those who think such details unedifying, can easily pass over this, and the next reading.

'he courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.' St. Luke tells us that amongst the great multitude of people that thronged around our Lord,' to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases,' were some 'from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon.' Our Lord Himself visited those coasts, and healed the daughter of a Gentile woman. Paul and Barnabas had passed through those parts after their first successful journey among the Gentiles. It was not then to be wondered at, that there were disciples to be found in Sidon, and that St. Paul knew of them. He no doubt told Julius that he had friends there, and gained permission, whilst the ship was discharging or receiving cargo, to enjoy some short time of refreshing intercourse with them. On this occasion, as often before, and afterwards, Christian communion cheered the apostle's heart, and prepared him for coming trials.

On going to sea from Sidon, the wind was unfavourable. This obliged them to go out of their more direct course, and, sailing under the lee of Cyprus, to pass *'over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia to Myra, a city of Lycia.'*

There, as was expected, a ship of Alexandria, laden with corn, and bound for Italy, was found. From the number of souls on board, and other circumstances, we may suppose her to have been a vessel of considerable size, probably from nine hundred to one thousand tons. As to her shape and rigging it

is only needful to say that both stem and stern were as nearly as possible alike ; that the ship was not steered by a single rudder ; but by two paddle-rudders, one on each quarter ; that there was one large mast, and one large sail fastened to an enormous yard, besides a smaller second mast and topsails. We must remember, too, in order the better to enter into the story, that the compass was unknown then, and that the instruments used for taking observations must have been rude and imperfect in the extreme ; nor were vessels provided with nautical charts, so that when 'neither sun nor stars appeared,' and the sky looked threatening, they hesitated to try the open sea.

From the moment of loosing from Myra the weather was unfavourable. From that port to Cnidus the distance is only a hundred and thirty miles, yet 'many days' were occupied in the passage. Leaving either from choice or necessity, the harbour of Cnidus, the seamen of the Alexandrian vessel sailed under the shores of Crete, and ran down to Cape Salmone ; after rounding which with much difficulty they came to a port, called then and still 'The Fair Havens.' They had reached a season of the year when it was considered imprudent to try the open sea. '*The fast was now already past,*' that is the great day of atonement, which took place at the end of September, or beginning of October, and corresponded to our Michaelmas. It was then a

matter for serious consideration whether they should remain at Fair Havens for the winter, or seek some better harbour. St Paul's advice was strongly given that they should remain where they were.

'Sirs,' he said, '*I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.*' The master and owner of the ship, however, perhaps resenting interference and advice from a landsman and prisoner, refused to be guided by the apostle; and the centurion hearkened to them rather than to him. It was determined, therefore, to make an attempt to reach another and safer port in Crete. At first all seemed to go well. The south wind blew softly, and they crept along close under the shores in the direction of Phenice, where they hoped and intended to winter. Then their dangers and troubles began. A violent wind, called Euroclydon, came down from the mountains, and struck the ship, seizing her and whirling her round, so that it was impossible for those at the helm to make her keep her course. They were compelled then, in the first instance to scud before the gale. Driven along furiously by the tempestuous wind they came under the lee of an island called Claudia, and there took advantage of a temporary lull to hoist on board the boat which they had towed after them, a work which they did not accomplish without great difficulty. Next they undergirded the ship with ropes passed underneath her, and

tightly secured on deck. Then they lowered the great yard and mainsail, fearing lest they should be driven on the famous quicksands (or Syrtis) of the African coast. Being still '*exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship,*' throwing overboard whatever could be most easily spared. But this was not enough; the third day both sailors and passengers united in throwing all the spare gear into the sea. Still the storm continued; for many days no glimpse of sun or stars could be caught in the over-clouded sky, so that they could not tell whither they were drifting, and all hope of being saved was relinquished. Just then it was, in the extremity of need, that God came in with timely help and comfort.

As before, when Christ's disciples were tossing in a storm on the sea of Galilee, it was not until their strength was well-nigh spent, and their hearts were failing—not until the fourth watch of the night—that he came to them and calmed the storm. So, now, in the case of the apostle and those who sailed with him, it was not until all hope was gone that a messenger from heaven came with words of encouragement. It is an old saying, and a true one, 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity.' When we were 'without strength,' without help, without hope, Christ died for the ungodly. And in the experience of most Christians, those words of St. Paul, so suitable to the condition of himself and his companions

on the occasion of this shipwreck, are often verified, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead ; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver ; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' (2 Cor. i. 9, 10.)

ACTS, xxvii. 21-24.

21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer : for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

It was just when things were at the very worst and darkest, that St. Paul stood forward in the midst of the distressed and despairing company, speaking words of encouragement. He reminds them of what he had counselled when they were in the port of the Fair Havens; how, anticipating danger, in all likelihood being supernaturally warned of it, he had strongly recommended them to remain where they were. And now he bade them take heart, for in the face of all that looked so dark and hopeless, he was well assured that no life of any one among them

should be lost ; the ship alone would be destroyed. ‘*For,*’ he continued, ‘*there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul ; thou must be brought before Cæsar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*’

We have seen, on two former occasions, how in the night by a vision at Corinth, the Lord spake to Paul, ‘Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace ;’ and again, at Jerusalem, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul : for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.’ And now, in a moment of extreme danger when, speaking after the manner of men, all hope of being saved was utterly taken away, a messenger from heaven appears saying, ‘*Fear not.*’ Let us try to picture to ourselves a little the state of things when the angel came. The roaring of the tempest, the dashing of the waves, the creaking of the timbers, the confused cries of those who knew not what next to do, the hopeless working at the pumps, vain petitions offered to false gods, moans of despair, and entreaties for help, and all the time thick darkness overhead, with utter uncertainty as to whither they were drifting ; in the midst of such tumult and terror God’s angel stood at the apostle’s side. We cannot, of course, suppose for a moment that St. Paul had a cabin to himself ; and evidently he was mixed up with all that was going on during that eventful night. Evidently his hands, and those of St. Luke, had joined in lightening the

ship. He alone however, it is quite plain, saw the angel. To the crew in general he was invisible. Their eyes were holden, like those of Elisha's servant in Dothan, until, at his master's prayer, the Lord opened the young man's eyes to see the heavenly host encamped around to defend the prophet. What a beautiful view it gives us of the power of angels, of the swiftness of their flight, and their readiness to succour God's people, that through the murky gloom and uproar of that wild night, an angel should wing his way to that ship tossing helplessly on the stormy deep, and stand calmly by one of its passengers, and whisper to him, unheard by others, '*Fear not!*' How near to us, how real, is the unseen world! Spirits are continually about us. Happy for us if, being heirs of salvation, spirits of light and love minister to us; and by Divine assistance sought in humble prayer, the Prince of Darkness and his host are kept at bay!

'*Whose I am, and whom I serve.*' In such words could St. Paul speak of Him whose messenger had just visited him. In one sense, indeed, the most careless and ungodly man might say of God, '*Whose I am.*' We are God's in right of creation and providence; God's in the same way as the potter's handiwork belongs to him. But it was not in this more general sense that St. Paul used the words. He spoke of a nearer, dearer, and more blessed relationship than this. '*Whose I am;*' I am His property,

indeed, but I am more, I am his purchase, His peculiar treasure; His to be led, and fed, and guided, and protected by Him now, and received to His glory hereafter. A child rejoices in the knowledge that he has a father able to protect him. A subject is happy in being under the rule of a powerful king. That which we prize we keep safely, and God prizes His people; they are near unto Him; they are His jewels.

Who can describe the happiness which flows to the Christian from the confident assurance that he is the Lord's? What comfort must the thought have given to St. Paul through the long dark hours of that tempestuous night! For he would reason thus within himself, 'He who hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet,' (Nahum, i. 3,) is my Father and my friend; 'the darkness is no darkness' to Him; though I be in the uttermost parts of the sea He is there; I cannot go out of the reach of His hand, out of the glance of His eye; He can save me from the deep that would swallow me up, or if it so please Him make its waters the path by which I reach His promised rest.

'Whom I serve;' here was the evidence of the apostle being in the highest, best, and happiest sense of the words, 'the Lord's.' Some who belong to God as His workmanship, dislike His service. St. Paul chose it, loved it, gloried in it. Perhaps we are

ready to say, 'No doubt St. Paul did serve God. He was called to be an apostle, to preach the Gospel, to write portions of the inspired Scriptures, to plant churches, to work miracles ; but what can I do? How can I serve God? We must remember that the service of God is not confined to great offices and great talents. 'If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.' There may be the *heart* to give where nothing is given ; and *willingness* to endure a martyr's portion where nothing is suffered. In a great building the boy who carries mortar has his use as well as the architect who plans the whole. God is building a vast spiritual temple, and the least and lowest may find honourable employment in its erection. Moreover, there is a service of *suffering* as well as of doing. If a Christian is confined to a sick bed he is not, therefore, to think that he can no longer serve God. Many have served Him best there. Many a good sermon has been preached, and many a useful lesson learnt, from the bed of a patient, suffering Christian.

'*Fear not, Paul,*' said the angel, '*thou must be brought before Cæsar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*' It would seem, from the words of the angel, as if the apostle had been praying on behalf of his fellow voyagers, and that their lives were granted in answer to his prayers. Of course, God could easily have saved St. Paul alone and have

left the rest to perish; but to save all for his sake was to put more honour upon him. The world little knows what it owes to God's people. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Nations are often saved and blessed for their sakes. That shipwrecked company had reason to be thankful that they had a Paul amongst them. May we, like him, so 'serve God with a pure conscience' that we may be to all around us a blessing!

ACTS, xxvii. 25-44.

25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;

28 And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred three-score and sixteen souls.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39 And when it was day, they knew not the land : but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground ; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape.

43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose ; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land :

44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

' Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer.' St. Paul, by whom those words were spoken, was a prisoner, wholly innocent of the crimes laid to his charge ; his advice about remaining in the harbour at Crete had been disregarded ; yet he showed no other feeling but that of compassion and sympathy. The state of his fellow-sufferers, their pale faces and haggard anxious looks, their cries of despair as the vessel rolled and plunged, and seemed about every

instant to be swallowed up by the billows, all this wrought on his large and tender heart, and made him in haste to give what comfort he could. '*Be of good cheer,*' then, he cries. But of what use could it be to utter such words except some new ground of hope had arisen? As far as appearances went all was as hopeless as ever. There had been no lull in the tempest, no break in the thick black clouds that overcast the sky. There was simply the angel's message to cling to as a ground of hope. But God sent the message and the messenger, and that was enough. '*I believe God,*' said the apostle, '*that it shall be even as it was told me.*' The words are very simple, but they teach a very important lesson. We lose a vast amount of peace and comfort because we do not reason as St. Paul reasoned, and act as he acted. 'God has said it, and I believe it.' All looked dark, gloomy, hopeless; humanly speaking, 'all hope of being saved was taken away,' but God assured his servant that no life of all that storm-tost company should be lost. And he did not begin to doubt and question, but rested calmly, satisfied that in His own time and way God would accomplish His purposes.

How happy would it be for us if in things which have to do with our bodies or our souls, with this world and the next, we could exercise simple faith like the apostle's. How happy if, taking one after another of the exceeding great and precious promises

of the Gospel, we could meet the temptations of the devil, and the secret fears and sorrows of our own weak hearts, with the sufficient answer, '*I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.*'

St. Paul had assured his companions that they should all be saved. There was, however, no sign of improvement. The gale continued in all its fury until fourteen days had passed, during which they had been drifting through the sea of Adria. At the close of the fourteenth day, about the middle of the night the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. They accordingly sounded and found it twenty fathoms, and soon after, sounding again, found it fifteen fathoms. Fearing lest the vessel would strike upon the rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and waited anxiously for the day. The coast could not be seen, but the breakers could be heard through the storm. The rain fell in torrents; and all hands were weakened for want of food. Just then the sailors selfishly attempted to save themselves and leave the ship and passengers to their fate. St. Paul discovered their purpose and informed the centurion of it, assuring him and the soldiers, that the presence and help of the crew were needful for their safety. The soldiers accordingly cut the ropes that held the boat in which the sailors intended to escape, and let her fall off. By this time the day was beginning to dawn. Once more St. Paul stood forward to counsel and cheer the ex-

hausted company. He exhorted them to take some refreshment, pointing out that this was for their health, and again assuring them of their ultimate safety. He set them the example himself; first giving thanks to God in presence of them all; and then eating. There is something striking and instructive in this incidental mention of the apostle's giving thanks in a public manner before eating. Nearly all that company were heathens, yet neither fear nor a kind of false shame kept St. Paul from acknowledging his God as the giver of every bounty. And then again under the peculiar circumstances, when all was confusion, and terror, if not despair, we should hardly have expected St. Paul to pause to ask a blessing before eating. Surely we are reminded that following the example of the apostle as he followed that of Christ, we should thank God for our daily bread and ask His blessing upon it; surely we can never have anything which can make it in any way as difficult to perform this duty as St. Paul had; surely we should try, as we sit down in peace and comfort at our well-spread tables day by day, to make our customary 'asking a blessing,' something more than a mere form, the real uplifting of hearty praise from devout and thankful hearts.

St. Paul's hopefulness communicated itself to the crew. They began to apply themselves to everything which could yet be done for their safety. The ship was further lightened by casting the cargo of

wheat into the sea. By the time this was done, the day had fully dawned. The sailors could not recognise the land, but saw a creek into which they determined to thrust the ship and run her aground. They cut the cables of the anchors, unloosed the lashings which had secured the rudders, and hoisted the foresail. Falling into a place '*where two seas met,*' they stranded the ship. The bow stuck fast, and the stern began immediately to go to pieces under the action of the sea. A new danger now beset St. Paul. The soldiers, being afraid lest some of the prisoners should swim away and escape, proposed to kill them at once. The centurion, however, again showing his regard for St. Paul, forbade the cruelty, and bade all consult for their safety as best they could. Some accordingly by swimming, and others by the help of broken spars and pieces of the wreck made their way through the surf, and all, as St. Paul had predicted, came safe to land.

So ended that disastrous voyage. St. Paul tells us that '*thrice he suffered shipwreck.*' We have, however, an account given us of only one of these shipwrecks ; but *that* full of deepest interest and instruction. Through those days and nights of distress and peril we see the apostle calm, brave, considerate, and tender-hearted ; and at the same time full of wise forethought, and sound judgment. We know whence his firmness arose, even from that faith which takes God exactly at His word, and believes that

what He has spoken He is well able to perform. And we see how God guards His servants, keeps His eye upon them by night and by day, in storm as well as calm ; and makes them, even amongst those who know Him not, a help and comfort.

ACTS, xxviii. 1-6.

1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness : for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly : but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

THE island upon which the vessel that carried St. Paul was wrecked, was found on landing to be Melita, or that which we now know by the name of Malta. Here St. Paul was brought for a short time amongst quite a different class of people from those

amongst whom he had chiefly moved. The inhabitants were of a Phœnician origin. The Greeks and Romans reckoned those of other nations who differed from them in customs and language as 'barbarians;' and the word is often used in this sense in St. Paul's Epistles. Whatever might be the name by which the inhabitants of Melita were called, they showed much kindness and hospitality to the shipwrecked strangers. On the other hand, they reaped a rich harvest of blessings from the visit of the apostle and his friends to their shores. It seemed to be a mere chance that the ship was driven by the tempest on their coast; there was no intention of landing there; yet how many owed bodily relief from sickness, and many more, no doubt, blessings for eternity to the shipwreck which brought amongst them the messengers of the gospel of peace. So it is that what men call chances of wind and weather, storm and calm, work out the great designs of a God of love. 'Be not forgetful,' says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, 'to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' The 'barbarous people' of Melita found those whom they received and entertained so kindly, little, if at all, inferior to angels in the benefits and blessings which they were enabled to confer upon them.

The first thing to be done was to kindle a fire, so as to restore some warmth and life to the bodies of those who were worn out with toil and fear.

drenched with water, salt and fresh, and shivering with cold. St. Paul, always active and energetic, helped in this work by gathering a bundle of sticks and laying them on the fire. Upon this a viper, which had been unobserved in the midst of the fagot, startled by the heat, sprang up and fastened upon his hand. There can be no question as to the nature of this creature. It was not harmless, as many snakes are. The word translated 'venomous beast,' plainly indicates that it was a true viper, or some snake fully as dangerous. So then, when St. Paul was enabled to shake it off into the fire without receiving any injury, we can only regard it as a miraculous interference of God's Providence on his behalf; a fulfilment indeed of our Lord's own promise to His disciples shortly before He left them, 'These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.' (Mark, xvi. 17, 18.) We have seen in the former parts of this book the fulfilment of some parts of this promise in the case of St. Paul; we know from himself that he spake with tongues more than any of his brethren; and now we see him handling without hurt that which commonly would be a cause of death. No doubt the miracle was wrought to open the way amongst the people of

Melita for a believing reception of the Gospel which St. Paul preached.

The first impression made upon the minds of those who witnessed the miracle was an unfavourable one; 'No doubt,' said they among themselves, '*this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.*' Does not the reasoning of these poor ignorant creatures strikingly illustrate and confirm St. Paul's own words, in his Epistle to the Romans, where, speaking of the Gentiles which have not the law, he says that they 'show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another?' (Rom. ii. 15.) Conscience bore witness to these people that punishment commonly follows sin. They saw what looked very like punishment, and they at once assumed that there had been the sin that deserved it. If conscience thus witnessed for God in the hearts of these poor unenlightened heathens, how much more strong and clear must be its testimony in the case of those who, like ourselves, live in the midst of Gospel light; and how solemn the responsibility which such a testimony entails upon us! Watching eagerly to see whether St. Paul was struck with death from the serpent's bite, the people beheld him shake it off into the fire unalarmed and unhurt. And when some time had passed and no ill effects

followed, they came to quite another conclusion, and instead of a murderer pronounced the apostle a god. So do men fly in their ignorance and folly from one extreme to another; as the Jews of old cried one day after our Lord, 'Hosannah,' and the next, 'Crucify Him!' One day they would have made Him a king, and another they said, 'Thou hast a devil.' We see how foolish it is to attach much weight to the opinions of men of this world, and to love their praise more than the praise of God.

We see also how little we can judge by outward appearances. To reckon trials as, in all cases, tokens of God's displeasure, would be as much mistaken as it was for those inhabitants of Melita to count St. Paul a murderer because of the viper which fastened on his arm. Trials are rather, in the case of Christians, tokens of God's love and painstaking care. Our Lord taught us that it was not on the most wicked people in Jerusalem that the tower of Siloam fell. There is a day coming that shall correct and explain all; shall clear up all difficulties, and reconcile all apparent inconsistencies: 'then shall we return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not.' (Mal. iii. 18.)

ACTS, xxviii. 7-15.

7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.

10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.

13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:

14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and The Three Taverns; whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

IN the immediate neighbourhood of the spot where St. Paul and his companions were cast ashore, was the residence of Publius, the chief man (or

‘governor’ as the title seems to imply) of the island. He received, and courteously entertained for three days, the apostle and his friends. In return for his kind hospitality St. Paul, after prayer for Divine assistance, was enabled to work a miracle of healing on the father of Publius, who lay sick of a dangerous illness. This wonderful recovery becoming known, others in different parts of the island who were sick came and were healed. So here again we see, what we have often seen before, the religion of Jesus Christ bringing with it health for men’s bodies as well as blessings for their souls. God deals with us as we really are, that is, beings composed both of body and spirit, and therefore having wants and necessities connected with each. Our Lord Jesus Christ when upon earth healed such a multitude of sick people,—relieved such a mass of infirmity and pain, that if He had only come down from heaven to do the work of a physician, His career would have been one singularly beneficial and successful. Of course, we know that He came to be the Saviour of sinful souls, as well as the Healer of sick bodies. But the Gospel brings a thousand comforts and benefits for this world as well as the next with it. The people of Melita no doubt learned many a lesson of saving truth from St. Paul and his friends; and health and soundness brought into many a family where there had been hopeless sickness before, made many to rejoice in the coming amongst them of the messengers of peace. In the

same way in these days, though cold-hearted, selfish, worldly men, speak scornfully of missionaries and their work, and ask 'to what purpose is this waste?' the simple fact stands forth uncontradicted, that where the Gospel of Christ and its preachers go, there earthly blessings come with them; medicines are provided for sickness; arts of civilization are taught; women are raised in the social scale; children are cared for; it is seen that 'godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come.'

After a three months sojourn in the island, St. Paul and his company once again set sail for Rome, followed by the parting blessings, and laden with the parting gifts, of those who had received from them so many benefits temporal and spiritual. The vessel which carried them away from Melita was an Alexandrian trader which had wintered in the island. Touching at Syracuse, and tarrying there three days, they came by a somewhat circuitous route to Rhegium; thence by a course of one hundred and eighty miles to Puteoli on the bay of Naples. From this place it was a land journey of one hundred and fifty miles to Rome; and before setting out on this last portion of the way St Paul and his friends obtained permission to stay a week with some Christian brethren who were found at Puteoli. Doubtless a Lord's day spent with them in prayer, and praise, and pious intercourse, refreshed

the apostle, and prepared him for coming trials. Then when the journey was resumed, tidings of St. Paul's approach having beforehand reached Rome, one party of Christian friends met the apostle at Appii Forum, about thirty-three miles from Rome, and another ten miles farther, at The Three Taverns ; *'Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.'* The strongest, bravest heart,—the man of most steadfast faith and warmest love, needs and values Christian sympathy. St. Paul had passed through many dangers and trials ; bonds and imprisonment and death lay before him ; but when he was met on his way to his prison at Rome by warm-hearted Christian brethren, who came to greet and cheer him, he thanked God for the well-timed encouragement, and went forward with a lighter heart to the endurance of new afflictions.

Thankfulness for the past and hope as to the future are always closely connected together. There is no better way of lightening present troubles, and learning to look hopefully forward to the future, than counting up our past and present mercies, and trying to thank God for them. For, let us always remember, God does not change as we do ; with Him mercies granted are mercies pledged. So then, when we look carefully into our mercies with a view to thank Him for them, there will surely spring up in our hearts a good confidence that God will *'continue His loving-kindness,'* that He who has begun to

bless will not in time to come reverse it. David says, 'Because Thou hast been my help, therefore under the shadow of Thy wings I will rejoice.' It may and ought to be true of the Christian in every stage and step of his earthly pilgrimage, '*He thanked God, and took courage.*' And when he comes to the close of it, still mingling thankfulness for the past with hope for the future, he may say with the Psalmist, 'Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

ACTS, xxviii. 16-22.

16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard : but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

17 And it came to pass that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together : and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar : not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, to speak with you : because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judæa concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest : for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.

UPON the arrival of St. Paul and his companions at Rome, Julius the centurion forthwith made his report, and delivered up his charge to Burrus the captain of the Emperor's body-guard; and then by his favour, no doubt, (for he had learnt to respect and value his prisoner,) the apostle was suffered to dwell by himself, except only the soldier to whom he was chained, and who was responsible for his not escaping. For two years from this time he was what he seemed to glory in being, 'an ambassador in bonds,' or as the words are 'in a chain.' We have read the words in which he says, 'For the hope of Israel I am *bound with this chain.*' Of Onesiphorus he says, 'He oft refreshed me, and was not *ashamed of my chain*, but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.' We should think it a most irksome thing to be both by night and day chained to a common soldier, the witness necessarily of all that was done, and the hearer of all that was said. But in St. Paul's estimation that which sweetened his bitter lot, and took away its hardship was this, that he was 'The prisoner of the Lord,' 'A prisoner of Jesus Christ,' and that his 'bonds were manifest even in the Emperor's palace,' as well as in other places, to the glory of God and the welfare of many.

Three days after his arrival, St. Paul called together the chief of the Jews, and explained to them that it was by no means his own wish to appeal to the

Roman Emperor, but that the untiring enmity and opposition of the Jews of Judæa had forced him to do so. He declared his entire innocence of the charges brought against him of irreverent profanation of the temple, and disregard of the religious rites and customs of the Jews. He had, he said, no wish to bring accusations against his countrymen before the bar of a heathen judge; it was they, not he, who compelled this. He was bringing before them no new creed, setting up no new object of worship; the hope which he had towards God was simply that hope which all the faithful Israel had long held and professed, the hope of a Messiah and of a resurrection to eternal life through Him

We have seen the apostle on two former occasions speaking of a hope which his Jewish accusers shared, or professed to share, with him; the hope of a resurrection, and the hope of Messiah; and these not two separate hopes, but two branches of one and the same great and blessed hope, growing out of the promises made of God unto the fathers.

It seemed delightful to St. Paul to speak of hope in connexion with the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus he writes to the Colossians of 'Christ in them, *the hope of glory*;' to Timothy he describes himself as an apostle 'by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, *which is our hope*.' Hope apart from Christ, is a false and delusive thing. It is the house built upon the sand of which the fall

and ruin are great. It is only when, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, that we can *rejoice in hope* of the glory of God. Only when we have 'fled for refuge to the hope set before us' in the Gospel of Christ, that we can find in hope 'an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast.' The 'hope of Israel' is *our* hope too. All the promises made of God unto the fathers which had to do with Christ's first coming, have been accomplished; let us not doubt, but confidently believe, that every promise of the glory yet to be revealed, built also upon Christ, shall be so completely fulfilled.

The Jews, to whom St. Paul spoke, denied having received from Judæa any unfavourable report of him; but added, that they wished to hear from his own mouth his views about the Christian religion; '*For,*' said they, '*as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.*' Simeon, at our Lord's presentation in the temple, spoke of Him as 'a sign which shall be spoken against.' The Jews, of course, meant to speak slightly and disparagingly of Christ and His followers. But in reality they furnish one of the strongest proofs of Christianity being from God. The world being what it is, so dark, and corrupt, and estranged from God, it would be a bad sign indeed if the religion of Christianity and its professors suited and pleased it. 'Woe unto you,' said Christ to His disciples, 'when all men shall

‘speak well of you.’ And so we may say, ‘Woe to the religion that has the good word of those who know not God and obey not His Gospel.’ We must not then think it a hard or strange thing if we should be misunderstood and misrepresented ; if men revile us and say all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ’s sake. Such usage as this our blessed Master Himself met with, and His apostles after Him. He told us to expect it, and gave us an abundant supply of comfort and encouragement in the blessing which He pronounced on those who suffer thus, and in the gracious assurance that, ‘*great* is their reward in heaven,’ and *certain* the acknowledgment of them which He will make before His Father and the holy angels in the day of His appearing.

ACTS, xxviii. 23-31.

23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

29 And when he had said these words the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him.

31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

AN appointment having been made between St. Paul and the Jews at Rome that they should come to him to be more fully informed about the Christian religion, '*many came to him to his lodging*' for the purpose; and to these, with untiring energy, the whole day long, the apostle '*expounded and testified the kingdom of God.*' Here in this last chapter of the Acts we see him doing just what, in one of the first chapters, and often afterwards, he and his brother apostles (all following the example of Christ Himself) did, that is, turning to the law of Moses and the prophets, for proofs that Jesus is the Christ. Thus witness after witness comes forward to show that the whole Bible, even that part where perhaps we should have thought that He was least to be found—the law of Moses—is full of Jesus.

The result of this fervent and faithful preaching of the Gospel was just what it had been often before; '*some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.*' And when there was much disagreement amongst those who had been listening to him, the apostle would not dismiss his audience without a word of solemn warning, founded upon a prophecy of Isaiah more often quoted in the New Testament than any other passage from the Old; '*Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have*

they closed ; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.'* The words have a fearful sound ; and in causing them to be so often repeated in His word the Holy Ghost must have meant to teach us a very solemn lesson. That lesson surely is this, that obstinate unbelievers bring upon themselves an awful doom of judicial blindness ; that they who wilfully close their eyes are ere long unable to open them ; that truth heard and rejected, at last fails to move or to interest the hearer ; that salvation neglected is at last withdrawn.

Once more, then, having obeyed the Lord's bidding to offer the Gospel first to the Jews, St. Paul declared his intention of preaching salvation to the Gentiles, amongst whom he was assured that he would find those who would receive it with willing hearts.

Accordingly for two whole years, dwelling (by the favour obtained for him in all likelihood by the kind centurion Julius) in a hired house of his own of sufficient size to receive all that came in unto him, the apostle preached, without hindrance, the kingdom of God. But let us not forget under what circumstances. The whole of the time St. Paul was in custody, chained by one arm to a common Roman soldier. And yet during those two years what a

* Isaiah, vi. 9, 10.

great and good work was done by the apostle ! In his epistle to the Roman Church, written three years before and sent from Corinth by Phœbe, he had expressed his desire and readiness to preach the Gospel to those at Rome whom he had not then seen. (Romans, i. 15.) Now he had his desire, and could *teach the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.* All the liberty that could be given him consistently with his being in military custody was granted. Nor was he without friends during his bondage. Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, ministered to him at Rome, as he had done in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Tychicus was at hand to carry his letters to churches which they had visited together. Mark, who was once a cause of contention between himself and Barnabas, ministered faithfully to him. Aristarchus and Epaphras were his fellow-prisoners. Luke his fellow-traveller was with him. Onesimus, the run-away slave of Philemon at Colosse, was led, either from curiosity, or some other motive, to listen to the preaching of the apostle, and was converted to the faith of Christ. St. Paul would have kept him with him, and have employed in the service of the Gospel one thus begotten in his bonds, but thought it right to send him back, a penitent and altogether altered man, to his own master. Nor was Onesimus by any means the only fruit of the apostle's labour in those two years of his imprisonment. Writing from Rome to

the Philippians he says, 'I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; so that my bonds in Christ (or *for* Christ, as it should be) are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places.' In the same epistle he sends greetings to the Philippians from the saints, 'chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household.' So even in the palace of a man who was a very monster of cruelty, lust, and tyranny, the Gospel of Christ had come with power to some hearts, and the apostle's patient endurance of suffering for Christ's sake, coupled with his faithful preaching, had been blessed to the salvation of many.

It was during that two years' captivity that St. Paul wrote and sent his Epistles to Philemon, to the Philippians, the Ephesians, and the Colossians. There is not one of these epistles that does not contain some allusion to his 'bonds'—not in the way of murmuring at that which he endured for Christ, for he had learned to glory in it, but to draw forth Christian sympathy, and impress more deeply on the hearts of those to whom he wrote lessons written or dictated under such difficulties. May we not hope that amongst the rough Roman soldiers, as one after another relieved guard in being chained to the apostle, some at least, struck with the patience, and love, and zeal of their strange prisoner, became soldiers of Jesus Christ? May we not well believe that

hundreds at rest with Jesus owe all their hopes for eternity, under God, to that imprisonment at Rome. And who can estimate the blessings which have flowed, and will flow to the end of time, from the letters written from that prison ?

After two years' captivity St. Paul was liberated, and, as far as we know, five years passed before his second imprisonment and martyrdom. He has long since obtained his desire to be 'with Christ.' O that we, following his bright example, and guided by his holy doctrines, may share at last his happiness in heaven !

THE END.

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